

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH LUCEANNE “LUCY” TAUFA**

An Oral History Conducted by Stefani Evans, Jerwin Tiu, and Cecilia Winchell

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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

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE



“I’m not scared now because people came behind me from where they came from, from any other country, so they can have a better life in America.”

From the Tongan island of Vava'u, Luceanne "Lucy" Taufa reflects on her life and takes time to highlight her experiences from swimming on the shores of her native island to immigrating to the United States. Taufa is the third child of eleven children in her family. Her father ran multiple business ventures including transport throughout the island to managing a family-run farm. Taufa’s father first immigrated to Hawaii and after obtaining a green card, her siblings followed him shortly after another. While her older siblings continued to pursue higher education and her younger siblings were too young to work, Taufa took on the bulk of the responsibility to work and provide income for her family. Her father, in order to manage business affairs back in Tonga, left Taufa and her siblings to navigate life in Hawaii on their own.

Soon after, with the help of her uncle, Taufu moved to Dallas, Texas in order to pursue better job opportunities. Working at a restaurant, she was able to save enough money to first bring her brother over before bringing more siblings all the while supporting their education. While in Texas, Taufu met her husband, whose job would eventually lead them to relocate to Las Vegas, Nevada. Since she has lived in Las Vegas, she has worked at the Palace Station Casino and the Pass Casino on Water Street. During her time at the Palace Station Casino, she witnessed significant unfair treatment from those in management positions targeted towards workers with darker skin, something that sparked her interest in joining the Culinary Union. Taufu talks about how joining the Culinary Union has been a step in fighting for better treatment, though it also invited more scrutiny. Since the closing of the Palace Station Casino, Taufu now works at the Pass Casino where management is more fair. Throughout the interview, Lucy reflects fondly upon her identity as a Tongan woman, relishing in the notable foods that she grew up with, and doing whatever she can to pursue the American promise and support her family.

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December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Stefani Evans, Jerwin Tiu and Cecilia Winchell

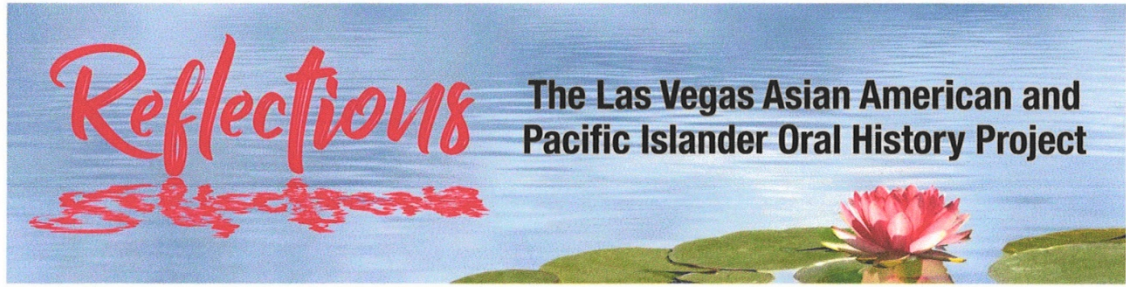
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**This is Jerwin Tiu, and today is December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022. I am here today with Cecilia Winchell, Stefani Evans, and Lucy Taufa.**

**Could you please start off by spelling your first and last name?**

My first name is Luceanne, L-U-C-E-A-N-N-E. Last name Taufa, T, for Tom, A-U-F-A.

**Let's get started. Could you tell me about your childhood? This is where you grew up, your family, where you went to school, and what you did for fun.**

I spent my whole time of my childhood at my island, South Pacific, it's Tonga Island. Mostly of my childhood is back home. I love it. It's like a paradise to me because I can play with my friends from one side of the village to the other side. Everyone watches us. We go swimming. We go picking all the tropical fruits, climbing all the trees, coconut trees. It's so fun. We can ride on a horse, and we can go to the ocean, swimming, and go fishing. My parents used to have a boat, and we'd go fishing. That's the best part. The best time to go to the ocean fishing is April, the month of April, because the month of April is when the dolphins come out, and we call those fish *pele*, and those are very friendly. We have to go out with my dad. What we did, we're making some flowers, take it out, and we make a little bell. When we ring that, they come out with their babies, and that's the best that you can see that. We throw them flowers, and they're dancing to us, and they are like an angel to us when we go fishing because they're going around us. The shark is very scary, those fish. They never come close to us. Yes, that's the best time.

I spent elementary in my own village. I loved that because the community, the parents help, church, and teach us to do the right thing, teach us to pray, teach us singing, teaches everything. This is from the first grade to the fifth grade, and then we have to take the test. The test we have to take is for what middle school you qualify to go to. Mostly of the church middle school, and they have a government school they call Tonga Middle School, but I was going to



the church they call Latter-day Saints Middle School. I went there when I was sixth grade, sixth, seventh, eighth. Then I have to go to the high school, and I went to the high school, and it started from ninth, tenth, eleven, twelve. That's mostly of my age from eight, younger, all the way to about seventeen to eighteen.

I came to Hawaii. My dad is the one that's taking...I came from a big family. I came from eleven kids, four girls and seven boys. I'm number three of the family. My dad came to America. He is the one that first came. When he came, he got a green card, like papers. By the time he came, my oldest brother and my oldest sister—I'm the third—they came to BYU, Brigham Young University at Hawaii. That's where we started and go on. Then my dad came back. He brought me and my younger brother. I have a brother behind me, back. He brought us to Hawaii.

When I came to Hawaii, it's hard because it's a different life. Because when we're back home, my parents have their own business. What they're doing, they're farming, and they have their crops, sending to New Zealand and Australia. Not even that, we have like a little grocery store, and all of us, we learn how to do things, help them out. My parents used to do a copper, like a coconut. In those times, it's very important for the life of people of Tonga because they sell the coconut; they pick up the coconut and cut and dry out and sell it out of the country. My dad had that kind of business; he bought coconuts from people. People sell it to him, and that's what we did. We helped them out with the coconuts, helped the farmer. We have a little grocery store, and so our parents teach us how to live our life.

We didn't know we were going to come to America, but we planned to go back home. We're going to come and get educated so we can go home and do more business. By the time I

came to America with my brother, we came for school. I started working and helping out my sister, but my brother graduated from BYU, and he went back home.

My parents started bringing all the siblings, and I went to BYU. It's kind of hard for me because after we have two, then three come. My parents are still back home, yes. My oldest sister, sister one, she is trying to finish college, to finish from BYU, but I am starting to go to school, my brother behind me works, and then three were brought, and so there is six of us.

**SE: And your parents were still in Tonga?**

They're still back home. I was decided, myself, my parents sacrificed my other siblings because the other three, younger, they're still in high school. Let them go to high school. Let her finish out. Let my other brother and me, we're working. I am working. I am working two jobs to pay the house, everything, my older sister is going to school during the day, and she works at night, and my younger brother works during the day and works in the night so that we can pay the rent for the house. It's very expensive in Hawaii. I walk every night, every morning to work. Then I quit from school because I cannot do two things at one time. It's very hard. But I feel like I have something to help out my siblings for their future. I didn't think about myself, but I think about them because they're little.

After a couple, three years later, then—my dad is back and forth. He helps us. He sent up some money. But the money back home, from America, is different. He always come three times a year to come check on us. It's very hard. My brother, the one that I came with, he went into the Army, Marine. Holy cow, it's so hard. I don't want to remember those times because it's a sacrifice.

My dad came and see how we're going on. He decided to move with my mom to come up and help us. They have more kids they came together with. When they came, it's hard to leave everything behind, but...

I went to Texas looking for a job, more job, because back home in Hawaii, they laid off people, and only I have to work because I was going to school. They have to lay off people that don't go to school. I had an uncle who came up to see what was going on. He said, "You can come with me to Texas, so you can work and help your parents." Okay.

Then I went to Dallas. When I went over there, I found a job, and I'm working two jobs. I lived with my uncle. The other people behind... When I have my money, I have to share it with my parents back home to pay their bills and stuff. I called one of my brothers. "You need to come and help me out." He came. It's not the one behind me. He's a Marine. But one brother behind him, he is in the University of [Hawaii]—UH at that time. I don't want to bother him because he is trying to go to school. The other one, he's number eight, he wanted to come here. I paid the ticket, and he came over there to Texas. We both worked. I moved out. I have enough money to pay a rent so that my brother can stay with me in an apartment. Then when I have my brother, I have enough money to pay another sister to come, and that way we build up; working, get some money, help mom and dad, help the rest to go to school.

But then I met with my husband.

**SE: You met your husband in Texas?**

We met in Texas. So, 1984, that's when I married with him. My brother who is still a Marine, he came in; sometimes he came, off and on, to us and visit us and go visit parents. But the business back home stopped. Only transportation. Because when my mom and dad left, they have a transportation business. We have, like, three buses. It's running through the whole island. It's

really good. But they had to leave because of us. The little ones, they try to let them finish high school. But my oldest brother went back and ran the business back home. That's how our parents moved to Hawaii.

We helped our parents, and my parents worked. My dad worked, at that time, when he was sixty-seven. He worked so hard. All his money he got, and us, we have, we bought a house in Hawaii. We still have that house. His dream is to go back home because he would love to do something to the islands, to the people. He loved to help them out. But we told him, "No, you can't go back. You have to stay with us. We're starting here, and then we start and go out. We have school. Everybody get married, have grandkids."

No. He wants to go back, and so he retired. He retired when he was seventy-five. Imagine that. He got money, bought the house, and tried to help other people, paint the school and all kinds of stuff, and then with a little money, he went back home. We love him to go home and relax, but he wants to work. He is the type of man that he works. He wants to do this. He wants to do that. But he is getting old. No, he didn't. He goes back and runs the business. Oh, my god.

What he did, he traveled to Japan with my brother. They traveled to Japan and got buses from there. His dream...because back home, we don't have a vehicle. It's hard to have a vehicle because it's so expensive, and only people that have money have a vehicle. They have cars and bike and all kinds of stuff like that. But he looked at the future of the children back home. The high school and the middle school is in the main capital. I came from Vava'u Island, and that island is called Paradise.

**SE: Paradise?**

Yes, Paradise. It's so beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. All those islands back home, that's the most beautiful islands. If you want to go there, I'm telling you it's beautiful.

He went back home, and he saw that people were still struggling to pay for their kids' school. The kids walk five miles to school. That's why he's planning to keep on doing that business. He took the kids to school. Sometimes the parent doesn't have money to pay for the school bus, and so we have to offer them, "When you have money, then pay." But some of the church schools, they pay the transportation for the kids, and some of them don't. It's very hard in those times.

By the time it's coming, people coming to America, going to Australia and New Zealand. They get all money. They saw what they miss at home, what they want back home. That's why they buy cars, trucks, everything. That's how our life, we grow up.

My dad passed away when the COVID shutdown. It's so sad because he went home and he's running that stuff, but he's starting to get sick. When you're eighty-five, you don't have to do things. You have to relax. No, he's not a type of man like that. He loved to go farm. He had cattle, horse, all kinds of stuff. He loved to go to the farm and look at that. He gave them names.

Sometimes I went back home. Us siblings, we have to have time to go and see them. Sometimes you don't want to come back. But we want them to come back. They have citizenship in America. When they move here, they change and became citizens. But they don't want to stay here. They want to go back home.

Before the COVID, my mom called me and called everybody. "Your daddy is in the hospital. There is something going on with him." I got the phone call at night before I go to work. I work at the Station Casino. My mom says, "Daddy is in the hospital." I was worried about him, and the rest of my siblings were worried about him. I went to work, but I told my husband, "Can you look for me a ticket as soon as possible? I need to go home." Back home, the hospital—the government tried to be updated every year. But when I look at what they told me

about him, I don't think they're going to find out because he has stomach pain so bad. They told him it's a cancer. I said, "Okay." I went. I told my siblings, "Let me go first. I want to go."

I left Fiji—it's hard to go back home because we have to go from here to L.A., L.A. to Fiji, try to get a flight from Fiji to Tonga. From the main island, we have to have a flight from there to my island. It's very hard. But God help me because I went the same day. In Fiji, there's a flight from that flight to this island where I grow up. I didn't know. I got the flight. It's only one day, and the next day I was back home.

When I went there, he is very ill. He doesn't look good to me. I called all my siblings that this is going to be time. This happened in 2018. I told my siblings, "I don't think dad is looking good." They said, "Well, don't bring him. Just leave him like that. He can live in peace." But on my mind, it's something telling me I have to bring him. I said, "Oh, wow, what is it?" All night long this is clicking and very strong to come up to my mind.

Then the morning came. I went home. We have a car. I drove home, and my mind is strong. When I came home, I told my mom, "My dad, I have to take him." "To where?" "Take him to Hawaii." "Why?" I had a feeling that it isn't cancer. My mom said, "You're not a doctor." And I said, "Well, but the feeling I have is so strong, I don't think it's cancer." Because they didn't explain to me any paper or X ray or anything to identify as a cancer. They said they think it's a cancer because the pain is so bad. I told my mom, "I have to take him."

I have to find a flight. This happened Monday morning. Monday morning, I went to the agency to ask if they have a flight. They said, "On Wednesday, there is a flight." But my dad cannot stand up. My sibling told me I'm crazy. "How are you going to bring dad? He can't walk." I said, "Well, let me figure it out." My mom told me, "Stop. Because you cannot go

straight from here to Hawaii, you go to Fiji, and you're going to stay in Fiji for four hours, how are you going to handle him?" I said, "Let..." But it's very strong.

The agency, they told me, "There's a flight on Wednesday, two o'clock, and the flight is full." Only first class is open. It's one seat. I said, "Okay, I'm going to pay the one seat." I said, "Oh, okay. How much for the one seat?" Two thousand five hundred, one way. I think about my dad's life. I cannot buy it with money. The money comes and go. I can have money. But I didn't have money; my dad had the money. I came back and asked my mom for the two thousand five hundred. "But you're going to take him?" "Yes, I will take him." Okay, we're going to pay the ticket. We pay the ticket for the first class.

I told the doctor, "I don't want you guys to put any medication on him." When I come to the hospital, I'm the type of person that is curious of things. A nurse came in and said, "I have to put the medication on him." "What kind of medication?" "I have to put it on an IV." "What is it?" "It's morphine." And I said, "No, it's not. You cannot do that." "But the doctor ordered it." "Why?" "It's to take the pain out." And I said, "Do you know that morphine is not good for the organs of the human being? Call the doctor."

When the doctor came, he said, "Yes, we have to put the morphine." "A hundred and thousand pain killers, you can give to him, but not that one." Because they thought it's a cancer. They stop. They stopped on Sunday. Monday, he woke up. He woke up and looked at me and said, "Oh, you came?" He doesn't remember me. "Yes, I came. I'm going to take you." "To where?" "Hawaii." "Oh, no." "But I have to find out what's going on with you."

Monday, he doesn't have a pain. Tuesday, I pray to God, "Please help me." I hope it's no pain at all. The doctor advised, "If you feel that way, that's fine. I'm not going to stop that because I don't know how to cure him or comfort him from the pain. But I will stop." Tuesday,

no pain. Wednesday morning came. My mom was nervous, stressed. “You can’t take him.” The doctor told me, “It’s better just to take him...because Fiji...I don’t know if he’s going to make it.” All kinds of stuff he’s telling me.

I was in Fiji. I was in school. I was in the hospital; I had a doctor there. “I think it’s not a good thought for you to take your dad.” “No, I will take him. But I will take him.” I took him.

We went to the airport, and he cannot get up. The airplane we went is not like over here to go to the gate. I think the airplane was about fifty people, but they had two classes, first class and second class. But we have to go on the step, up. My mom said, “How are you going to get him up there?” I’m going to tell the airline to take him up, and so people helped bring him up. He doesn’t want to come. He was crying, “I don’t want to go. You’re going to take me, and I’m going to die over there. You’re not going to bring me back. This is my home. I love my home.” I said, “Dad, I think it’s not cancer. You’re going to be fine. You’re going to feel better. We’ll go find out.”

We get into the little airplane. It is a three-hour flight from the islands to Fiji. When we got there, we come into a gate. Coming out is easier. They have a wheelchair and stuff like that. We stayed there for seven hours in Fiji to get the flight to Hawaii, and I hope everything is going to be fine. “Everything is going to be fine for you.” I call everybody, “Pray for us. I hope he’s going to be fine.” He’s hungry, and the doctor said, “The only thing you’re going to give to him is liquid, no hard things for him,” because of the stomach. We went to the restaurant to make a soup. I have a shake for him.

Then the flight came, and we came all the way to Hawaii. The flight is a six-hour flight. God bless, nothing happened to him. He doesn’t have pain. He feels good. I don’t know, maybe in his heart to make it over there.



But when we got there, we rush him to the hospital. When we got there, they take a test. It's not a cancer. It's an infection. It's a kidney stone. It makes sense because the kidney stone is so painful. There is another thing, like liver things, it's green; it's infection. That infection is because of the morphine. They say, "If it's late in hours, the thing is going to pop, and that's it." We found out it's a kidney stone.

My dad, more, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and then he passed away. He had two years. But when he comes back, he planned to go back. He walks and does the same thing, and he's eighty-nine. That's my story for my family. It's kind of sad.

When the COVID started, we didn't know he was going to pass so fast. But I got the phone call on Monday night. They closed Sunday; my job closed Sunday night. I got the phone call, "Dad's sick." "Okay. What's happening?" And then the news came up, Thursday came, "Hawaii is going to close down." Airport, everything, no in, no come out, no. I planned, okay, I'm going to go before they close.

**SE: Because you have to go through Hawaii.**

I have to go. But he's in Hawaii at that time. When I got there Monday, I look at him, and he's really sick. He is really sick, and his wish is to go home. I said, "When this thing is over, then you're going to go home." I promised. I promised to him, "I will take you back home." But we didn't know. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday he passes away. That's the story of my family. He's a pioneer. He is buried in Hawaii.

My mom is still alive. My mom is ninety-two years old. She is in Tonga right now. They thought that was their home forever, their life. I think that's how every parent...they have to go back where they grew up, where they love to stay. But she's home right now.

I married to my husband, 1984. After six years, we have our first child, and it's a boy. Every two years, I have babies. I have two girls and a boy. I have another girl that I adopted. That's my brother's. I love families. I love kids. I love to take care of kids. The youngest, she thought of us as her parents, but that's my brother daughter. We told her, "Your parents live in Texas. You can go back and forth." No, she still stays with us. She is twenty-four years old now. That's the youngest.

**JT: Thank you so much. We're going to go back and ask you some questions about some of the things you said. First, I would like to ask: How did your parents meet?**

My parents grew up in the same village. That's how they met. They're not related. No, they're not related. Back home, you can marry your relative, first, second, and third. It's insane in our culture to marry to your second cousin, your fourth cousin. Everybody is family. That's what it is. Before you're grown, who are you going to marry to? That's the parents, both parents.

**JT: Do you have any memories of your grandparents?**

Yes, I do remember. My mother's mom passed away at a hundred and two. She is a very nice lady. That's my mother's mother. My mother's father, he passed away thirty years ago, before she died. My grandmother passed away in 1992, and she was a hundred and two. I didn't see my grandfather, my mom's dad.

My dad's parents, I saw both of them. I played with them. They had a house. We loved to go to our grandparents' house because they treat us very... They don't hit us. They give us what we want. That's why I love grandparents. I remember my dad's mom, she is a lady that she's sewing. She sews wedding clothes. She used to go to New Zealand and go to school, doing sewing. You can tell her the pattern you want for you. She pick it out, she draw it, design it, she sew it. That's how she is. She is very, very talented. Then she knows how to bake. That's why I

love to go to grandparents' house. They're baking. They're baking cakes. They're making candies. I love that. This is my dad's side I'm talking about.

My grandfather, my dad's father, I loved to talk to him. He passed away when he was ninety-one years old. My grandmother, his wife, passed away I believe between sixty to sixty-two. She had a stroke. But I saw her. They both were very, very talented. I loved to go to my father's parents because my grandfather always spoke English because he went to school in New Zealand. When we went to the house, he wanted us to talk in English. *Hi. Hello. How are you?* But what happened to him, he was blind. But he taught us to speak English. He said, "You have to speak the language because one day you might go somewhere they speak the language you don't know." That's my grandparents, the parents of my father. He wasn't blind, but he went blind when he was old because he was welding.

**SE: A welder?**

Yes, welding things. He's a business guy, and he do things like metal, metaling stuff. I think that's what caused it. He didn't see me, but he saw my older brother and my sister when they were little, but he didn't see me. But he was so fun because when we come to him, we give a hug, and he wants to touch all the way down. "Oh, you're getting tall," like that. But he loved us to speak English as a second language to us. Some kids, they loved to go with him because he would say, "You have to come here and talk to me in English, tell a story." I think the life back home, they knew what's happening to your life in the future to build you up. If I knew that I came to America, I want to stay with him and speak. He speaks English very well. He talks to people, and they listen. He traveled, planned, to America. That's it. Pay the ticket, plan, come to America, because the way he talks, he knows what's going on. And then because he had kids over here, they taught him how to feel to learn language and stuff like that.

My other grandparents right there, I didn't see my mother's dad, but only my grandmother. She is royalty, that lady, and she came from a family that are very known back home in her history, and that history came to us. We learned about that. It's back home in Tonga. She passed away when she was a hundred and two years old.

**JT: Thank you. Going more forward, what island in Hawaii did you guys go?**

My parents brought us to Oahu. That's why we go to school in BYU because BYU is in Oahu.

**JT: In Texas, what kind of work did you do?**

I worked at the restaurant. I used to be a cashier. I went from cashier to management.

**JT: Could you tell me how you met your husband?**

Yes. I met with my husband because he is Tongan. He is Tongan, too. Back then in Texas, there are few Tongans around there. There are not a lot of Tongans. But we met in Christmastime because when holidays come, all Tongan people get together and celebrate, that kind of stuff, but that's how I met my husband. I met with my husband in Christmastime, yes.

**JT: From Texas, did you guys move to Las Vegas after?**

My husband works for the airline. He came to Texas to go for school and end up married with me, and he works for the airlines, American Airlines. We married over there, and we end up to California. We were in California. Then we have our first child in California, first and second. But the first one, I went to Hawaii to my parents' and had him there. But the second one, in California, Los Angeles. The third one is a girl. The fourth one, over here. But my husband, yes, worked for the airline.

**JT: You guys moved here for his work?**

That's why we move up, because of his work. We relocate for a job.

**JT: What did you think of Las Vegas when you first arrived here? What were your first impressions?**

Oh, my goodness. My husband came up one night. "We're going to move." "Where are we going to move?" "They gave us four places to move: Miami, Chicago, and Las Vegas." "Hmm, wow." I have no familiarity with Chicago and Miami. I said, "Too far from Hawaii to see mom and dad. Las Vegas? Wow." But I heard the history of Las Vegas is gambling. I told my husband, "No, I don't want to go there." I had never been here, but I saw on the movie, I saw on the news, and I told my husband, "Have you been in Vegas?" He said, "Yes." "I think that's why you would like to move to Vegas because you went to Vegas, not me."

He came from New Zealand. He mostly traveled in Tonga, and then he moved to New Zealand. Most of his life is in New Zealand. He came over here for a rugby team, and then he ended up coming because the parents said, "You need to look for a school." He found a school in Texas, and so he studied there.

But he came up with, "We're going to move to Vegas." "Not Vegas." At that time, he came up that January-February. He came up, and I was six months pregnant. I said, "At this time, we're going to move again?" It was so hard. It was a hard decision for me and him. He was going to quit the job because I don't want to go to Vegas. I told him, "I don't want Vegas. Maybe even quit." He came up, and he said, "We can try. If we don't make it over there, then we'll move to Hawaii or find somewhere else other than Vegas."

The last two weeks they told him, and then he made his decision, "I'm going to move to Vegas." He moved over here. We end up here. He came. But let me tell his story. He came up over here. We have two vehicles. I said, "You take the small car with you." We don't know anybody here. He doesn't know anybody here. We don't know anybody from Tonga. We don't

know, and he doesn't know. He said, "We went to Salt Lake, but we went through and played on the machines, that's it. I don't know anything. But that's all I knew of Las Vegas. Now, I'm going to go back."

His job helped him out to move down here. When he moved down here, we planned. At that time, I was seven months' pregnant, and so I tried to hide it from my parents; I don't want to tell my parents that my husband is going to Vegas because my dad is going to think about gambling in Vegas. One night, the phone rings, and my son answered the phone. My dad asked, "Where is your mom" "Over here." "Where is your dad?" "In Las Vegas." "What?" "In Las Vegas." "Oh, your dad...When?" "I don't know." He was five years old.

He gave me the phone, and my dad said, "Is your husband in Las Vegas? He go gamble?" I said, "No, he goes for work." "What kind of work?" "The job he works here. They relocate him to go over there." "Oh, no. So, how many months you have?" "Seven going to eight months." "Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. No. I don't agree with that." Then he said, "Where are you going to have the baby?" "Maybe I'm going to have it in L.A. until my husband is going to be settled down, looking for this..." "No, I don't agree with that. Call your husband to call me." And I said, "Oh, wow, but are you going to be mad at him?" "No, I'm not. Tell him to call me." "Okay."

I hang up. I said, "Call dad to Hawaii. I think he's mad." And he's scared to call him. I called him, "Call him right now." After half an hour, I call my mom. "Did my husband call?" "No, we're waiting for the phone call." Oh, my gosh, it sounds serious. I call him, "Call him." He said, "What did they say?" I said, "Just call him. I don't know what he wants. Just call him."

He calls my dad. "You're in Las Vegas?" "Yes." "So, your family is in California?" "Yes." "So, how long are you guys going to be like that?" And my husband, "Well, I'm trying to

work. I'm looking for an apartment to bring the family." "No, I don't agree with that." My husband, "But I don't have enough to look for a house because I have to look for a three-bedroom for the kids." My dad said, "I'm going to send you money." My dad told him, "Give me your account number. I'm going to deposit money for you. As soon as you get the money, look for a place to live and bring your family as soon as possible." My husband said, "Oh, okay."

Then he called me. He sounds like maybe something is going on. He sounds like he's so excited. He said, "Oh, your dad is going to send me money to look for a place to live so you can come right away."

The next day, like two o'clock, he called me. "I got the money in the bank." I think, oh, yes? "It's three thousand dollars." Oh, my gosh, wow. I was crying because he sacrificed. He said, "I am looking for an apartment right away."

Only a week, he found and then he called. My dad said, "Look for it and call me at the end of the weekend to what's going on, what's happening." They talked Friday. Saturday morning, two o'clock, he checked the bank because the bank is still open. He said, "There is money inside there." Then we started looking on Sunday. He asked the job to give him two days off so he can look for an apartment. He found the apartment on Tuesday. He called me and said, "Get ready. I'm going to come on Thursday and pick you guys up. I found an apartment." Then he called my dad, "I found everything. I'm going to bring them. I'm going to bring her back with the kids."

But I told you I was eight months. I had the baby in May. We moved here the last week of April. I thought maybe I had enough time to...No. April. Then things happened and changed my life. The doctor in L.A...I told my dad, "I have to have the baby because the doctor is here." And he said, "There is a doctor in Nevada. The job is going to help you guys." I don't know how

he got that, but I called the job, and they had a doctor, insurance, everything. “Call the doctor. You’re going to have the baby. They’re going to fix that for you guys. You need to go.” Oh, my goodness.

**SE: Where did you have your baby?**

At home.

**SE: Here?**

Yes. At home. I had a midwife. Let me tell you. That story is amazing. When we got here, I’m thinking maybe my husband is scared about my dad to tell that story, and he tried to work for our family because he take off. It’s kind of stuff like that. He called the insurance. “Well, give me a doctor because my wife is going to have a baby, I don’t know, maybe in May, maybe in June.” The insurance said, “We’ll find that out.” They found a doctor, and we went into the doctor, and the doctor said, “Oh, you’re going to have a baby in the next three weeks.” Oh, my gosh. We called the insurance, “Next three weeks we’re going to have the baby.” But the doctor was scared about delivering the baby because he didn’t have everything. I mentioned we had a midwife. I told my husband, “Midwife?” “Yes.” We didn’t have mom and dad as a midwife. We’re going to have the baby at home. The insurance called a midwife, and the midwife came to our house and explained everything to us, what is happening. Oh, my baby is in the hospital; now he’s going to bleed to death. Oh, my gosh.

But what happened before, we didn’t make a decision. Maybe the midwife tells us, “This is what’s happening.” The doctor tells us, “When you feel, then run to the hospital. It doesn’t matter. Somebody is going to be there to take care of it. We need your file history. Get it from your doctor.” We gave everything to them.



One week before I'm going to have the baby, the kids are sick. Oh, my gosh, we have nobody here. There is my two daughters and that boy, all sick. My husband tells me, "Oh, my gosh, they're sick. What are we going to do?" I was so strong. I told my husband, "Call the midwife. I need to deliver the baby at home." My husband is, "What's happening?" I said, "No, nothing happened." I be very strong to have the baby at home so I can see the kids. "Who are we going to take the kids to? Nobody here. Call mom and dad." I said, "No, I don't want to call mom and dad." It's too soon. Everything is complicated. But I had a strong feeling. I was very strong. The midwife came, and I'm going to have the baby. The midwife told me, "You know what? I think you're going to have the baby next week. That's what it looks like to me." Yes, it happened.

**JT: After you had your last kid, did you go to work, or what did you do after?**

I would stay home. My husband worked two jobs. I will stay home and take care of the kids. My first one goes to school, the second, the third. When the little one is starting, he was four years old going to...not the first grade.

**JT: Kindergarten?**

Not to Kindergarten. It's a pre-Kindergarten. That's when he started. When he went in, I figured out, oh, my husband needs to get out of one of his job because he's so tired, and I need to go to work. I told him, "I'm going to look for a job. I look for a job, graveyard." That's what I told him. "I would rather stay with the kids during the daytime and take care of them and help with homework, and he's going to come home and stay with the kids during the night, so I can go to work. I started to go to work when my little one started preschool. That's when I started.

**JT: Switching topics, do you cook any Tongan food at home?**

Oh, absolutely.

**JT: What kinds of foods do you cook?**

We have dessert. We make it from flour, and then we make the sauce from sugar and mix it. That's a dessert they call *faikakai*. Then I cook what they call *lumpulu*. They make it from spinach, and the spinach with the meat made with taro leaves, but mostly of corned beef with the coconut milk. That's what we made. Tongan food, we used to have tapioca, cook and put some coconut milk. Then we have soup, make the meat with the soup, coconut milk and stuff with starch, like flour. That's how I make Tongan food.

But the kids, you know how we have McDonald's? Yes, like that. We have pizza. I'm starting to have hamburgers and hotdogs at home. They love it. But that's what I cook. But when they're becoming older, they don't like our food. They love *lumpulu*. My husband used to cook roast pig. At Christmastime, he roasts piglets.

**JT: What is your favorite Tongan food?**

My favorite Tongan food is *lumpulu*. Because I made it. [Laughing] My husband roasts the pig. He is so good. But it's not all the time. He just did it only at Christmastime.

**JT: Do you practice any Tongan traditions or celebrate any Tongan holidays at home?**

The Tongan holidays...so, we moved down here. We celebrate the American holidays. We moved down here in 1995. It's mostly our life with my family over here since 1995. We don't have a lot of Tongan people around here.

But holidays back home, I love it, Christmastime, that month of December. Back home, Christmas to us is family, get together. Not only your family, but first cousins, second cousins, third cousins, we celebrate. We make food. In the Christmastime, we're singing Christmas songs and stuff like that. We play net ball, like basketball. Football, mostly for the boys. That's what it is.

**JT: Do all your children live here in Las Vegas?**

Yes.

**JT: What about all your siblings?**

I have two siblings that live in Hawaii. Mostly, in Texas, they live there. One in Houston. But they live in Dallas/Ft. Worth. Me and my oldest brother live here. That's the only family. He just moved down. I was living here before him. But only him is family.

**JT: A different topic. Have you ever felt any discrimination against you, or anyone that was unkind to you because you were Tongan, or anything like that?**

Not really in Vegas. I went to church with my kids, and the church is mixed. They have White, they have Mexican, they have Black, they have Brown. I don't see discrimination there. The only one thing I was looking at is the job. Lately, I can see that. But where I live in the community, the community is very nice. People, like the senator, like the mayor, I can see it's amazing there at the job. I can see that.

**SE: Can you tell us about that?**

Jobs.

**SE: How so on the jobs?**

On the job, you can see...Every job we have, we have a duty to do. The duty to do, I have to do this. They line up. I used to be a host cashier. The host cashier, I have a job to do. I'm a cashier, do money, I answer the phone, stuff like that. But then they tell me, just clean the table. As a server, serving people. But discrimination, I look at it, that's what I feel and saw it in my eyes. I'm Brown. They told me, "Go clean the table." Even though it's wrong, but I have to do it. Why I have to do it? Because I need money to take care of my family. If they fire me because at that time, my husband is starting to be sick, has a heart disease, and I have to work, and he is off and

on from job. Then he has open-heart [surgery]. I told him, “I think you can stay home. It’s not worth it.” I worked two jobs. But when I work, it’s hard for me because they tell only my skin...that’s what I think why they told me to go clean the table. I have some other, host cashier. They’re White. They don’t tell them, cage cashier. But I have to do it because I don’t want to be fired. I look at those times, and it’s in and out firing people, crazy. That’s why I feel like because I have to go on my own duty to do it because they told me to do this. Not only to clean the table, but go to dishwasher. Huh? I look, why me? That’s what I feel, discrimination.

I was thinking about, I have to go and file this. I told Human Resources, the job. They said, “Well, yes, we’re going to look at it. We’re going to look at what’s going on.” Okay. Nothing come up, nothing. But I keep going, go on and on. I’ve been in that job seventeen years. I don’t want to start all over again for another job because when you start all over again, you have to be ninety days for health insurance. My husband is on medication. I have kids. They’re sick. Where are you going to go? I keep on with that job. That’s how I feel, yes.

**JT: Switching gears a little bit, what is your favorite part about living in Las Vegas?**

My favorite part of living in Las Vegas, friends. Sometimes we get together, their kids’ birthdays, my kids. I love where I live because they have the park. It’s very nice. The city built more places, parks for the kids to go play, like exercise. That’s why I love Las Vegas, because they have places for everybody to go. Like seniors, they have a place to go exercise, to get together. Like teenagers, they have a place to go, and they have activities, play soccer, basketball for the community. I live in Henderson. Henderson has a really nice program for the families.

**Thank you. I have one more question, but before that I’ll pass it over to Stefani and Cecilia for any questions that they have.**

**CW: On that, how big would say the Tongan community in Las Vegas is?**

Right now, we're starting to have people get together and do things like back home, not different things, it's like celebrate Christmas. This coming Saturday, we celebrate Christmas. We make a festival of songs. Every church, people that have a Tongan community, they prepared their own song for Christmas. That's this coming Saturday. Then we have potluck. We bring your own favorite food. By Christmastime, everybody spends their own time with their family. It's not a lot of people around here. It's maybe not even a hundred people. It's a few people because they thought Las Vegas is gambling. They didn't want to... They said, "Come to Las Vegas." "No, we don't want to come to Las Vegas. We come for a visit and vacation, but living there..." But I made it my life in Las Vegas.

**CW: Do you consider yourself religious?**

Yes. I am Latter-day Saints, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am very active on the church. I do the program with different ages, like adult, youth, kids.

**CW: How did you get involved with the Culinary Union?**

From job because we have problems on the job. One time, I do believe it was 2008, it's firing, crazy, people. You're scared to death. I don't want to go to work because they're standing by the time clock. "Here is an envelope." When you look at envelope, "Hand me your ID." That person walk, crying. You don't have anything to tell them. "Why you have this layoff?" They call it layoff time. "The business is not good. We have layoff." You don't know at what time you're going to be laid off. They told us, "We have a layoff." It's crazy, that's how it is, I'm telling you. But I made it every day. I do believe God. I pray every day. "God, help me. Please don't put my name on the list of layoff." When I go over there, two people, security and Human Resources, standing there. Before you punch out, "Please, here, give me your badge." I keep the badge. That's a sad time. Like us, when I look at it, he wouldn't cry. I went to work, my stomach all the

way to my back, stress. I have to do whatever. In that time, they told us, “Whatever they tell you to do, you have to do it.” I hang in there like crazy. I have to be there like half an hour early so I don’t be late. If you are one minute late, that’s it, bye-bye. It’s crazy, life.

That’s why I joined the union: I heard they were going to help stand up for your rights. They help to see what’s going on, what happened, your problems. That’s what it is. That’s why I joined the union, because I heard the story, and they told us, “Yes, we’re going to help you.” Even though they help, they don’t care; they could fire people. But the union fights to bring them back. Yes, they bring them back. But me, I’m telling you, I was in the union, but even though it’s wrong what they did, I have to do it.

**SE: Even after seventeen years.**

Yes. Seventeen years, it’s still bite my tongue. From 2008 all the way to 2020, I’m telling you, it’s really hard because they know where you’re going to be. They know you’re going to be on a union. They try to look for little things to get on you. But I was hanging there, crazy, hard.

Finally, we vote the union. Oh, my gosh. I don’t know how to explain it. This is like a scary movie. You can’t sleep because of the job, your family, it’s on your head to work. That’s what it is. That’s how I joined the union, to help me, and they helped me to go through, all the way to 2020 when the hotel closed down. Yes, that’s what it is.

**SE: As bad as it was at work, at least you knew you had protection?**

Even though I have a union, but they fire people who are union. They fired the union people, and the union fought to bring them back. But I was thinking about if they fire me, yes, the union is going to bring me back, but how is my family going to eat? How are the bills going to get paid? It’s hard. In 2020, they closed down. Even though they closed down, I was relaxed because there is no going back to work, but it’s in my mind like a bad dream.

They don't appreciate. It seems like to me it's like discrimination. But I hope our energy and our plot not go into them to be a poison to their life because I look at people we work with. Everyone is doing their best, especially Brown people, like Mexican people. Do you see any White people to go into the bathroom and stuff? No, not like that. Brown skin, they treat us like...The memory in my mind is like you're going to war. It's up to now. Treat us so bad.

**SE: Even now?**

See, I changed jobs. The new job I have is better than that, relaxed. I'm relaxed at that job. I'm a cage cashier. The people there are different. They treat us very nice. But the problem there is you start all over again, pay. The pay is very, very low. I start with eleven dollars for the cage cashier, for protection from one million money inside the cage.

**SE: All that responsibility.**

Yes, I'm responsible for that. But when I was finishing Stations Casino, I was seventeen dollars something. Here, almost half of my pay. I work. I save money because I look for work so I can give something for my grandkids for school. It's not happened. I used all my savings paying my house, paying bills, my husband. For right now, paycheck to paycheck is not enough, and he's sick. But I hang in there. I still have my house. That's what it is. The paycheck, I took it home. It's five hundred for two weeks. Do you think I'm going to survive with that? No. But every penny I have, I use it.

**SE: You said you worked two jobs. What is the other job you work?**

I used to work two, but I can't work two jobs because my husband is sick. I have to take care of him. My husband is retired. The retirement and my job, we pay the bills, electricity, everything like that. We don't have any savings. Maybe in our savings we've got maybe twelve dollars. My kids help us a lot. They give us money. They put gas in my car. They pay my husband's bills if

he goes to the hospital. Lucky that I have kids. If I don't have kids, I don't know where I go. Maybe I'm going to be homeless. But when I look at this time of economic [issues], I don't know how people survive. It looks like I'm going to go back to school. No, I'm not going to go back to school. It's more money there, and I'm sixty-four. I'm going to be sixty-five years old. No.

**SE: What would you like us to know?**

I hope the government do something. I used to be middle class. I'm not. I'm not the middle class now. I'm low. All those things in coming up, it not help us at all, and I don't think in the future they're going to... They talk about this and that to help you guys. No. It seems like it's only getting worse. I need the government to help. Not only we help some of our friends, but some of them pass away. They can't make the trip. But help.

When they closed down, my job told us, "We're going to call you back." Okay. We wait. They put it up in the (Dyson). "You come and fill out application." Yes, I went. Everybody filled out. My friends, we called each other. "Let's go." We went and filled out applications. But it was hurting me. One time I went and applied at Stations Casino. I went to Green Valley Hotel because they have a job fair. I went over there, and I apply. They told me after I applied, "You go to the middle, and we're going to call you." It's a job fair. I got there about two o'clock. I filled out my application, and then I waited over there. I have some friends that came, and they called them. "Oh, I'll talk to you later." When I came and sit down, I waited and look at the time, one hour, four, still waiting. At five, still waiting. Six, still waiting, and only a few people are there, maybe about ten people. Almost seven, because they closed at seven, everybody leaves except me. I think this is discrimination. I wait. Most of them, they left. The people for Stations Casino, one guy came up, "What are you waiting for?" I said, "I'm waiting for them to call me."



“Oh, what’s your name? The people that are supposed to be here, they left already. Give me a name.” I gave him my name. “We’re going to call you.”

That’s the last time. It hurt. I went home. Then I was looking for a job because the Stations Casino promised to us that they’re going to call us back to work when they opened, or they’re going to relocate us to another place. “But you guys have to apply again.” Well...Then I went home and started looking for a job.

The following week, they said they were having a job fair for this small casino. One day before the job fair, one lady called me, my friend. “Go and apply today.” I went to apply about three o’clock. “Go apply at the job fair starting for tomorrow, so you apply already.”

I went in and applied, and the supervisor called me, right there. She said, “I looked at the application, and I’m going to call you in the next three days. Do you want to work with us?” And I said, “Anything. I don’t care. Cleaning, phone, anything.” “Well, your application, it looks like you can work in a cage. Do you want to work in a cage?” And I said, “I didn’t have experience for the cage. I have experience for counting the money. I used to work in the Palace Station. I worked in the theater. Thousands and thousand of money, counting every night. But maybe I can make it.”

After a week, they called me. You do your fingerprints, run your test, everything like that. Then I started working for them. This is almost two years now. But the job, even though they pay me small, I feel comfortable. They treat me, and not only me, they treat other people fairly.

**SE: Where do you work now?**

I work at Pass Casino in Henderson, Water Street, in the cage.

**SE: And they treat you with respect?**

Yes, they treat me with respect. It's fair there. What they line up my duty to do, that's it; I follow that. They don't give me anymore. This is the duty from day one. They are very respectful.

**SE: Is that a union job?**

They are not union. The only thing, I joined the union to have fairly treat, treat people equally. That's why I joined the union, because they treat me on that job, and they write me up. If you don't change the trash, if you... Why me? They tried to get me one day. I come up and tell them, "No, it's not. I didn't do it. I'm not lying." They look at the camera, and they found it out. Sometimes I fight. But most of the time, I have to do it. Even though it's wrong and it's not my job, I have to do it because my family is on my hand to take care of.

**SE: Your story is really important.**

I didn't know. My life isn't very good. It's miserable. I change to a citizen. Why I change to a citizen of America? Because it's freedom. No, it's not. It's not freedom. I want government to treat people equally. This is what I was for. I don't want people to follow the way I came from. I want them to have a better life. I told my kids, "You've got school, better life." What I'm doing today is the future for tomorrow.

**SE: Tell us about your shirt.**

I went up there, the Freedom Ride. I went on a trip, amazing trip. I never had that trip before in my life to go from one city to another city.

**SE: What did you do?**

Fight for your rights, that's what it is. That's why I went, to fight for my rights. Then I realize I should do that from the beginning, but I was so scared because my family is here to take care. But right now, I want to fight for my rights.

**SE: You're not scared.**

I'm not. I'm not scared now because people came behind me from where they came from, from any other country, so they can have a better life in America. Because in America, they have a good story about America; they have freedom over here. You can have rights. That's what it is, working for the rights. They have to see who is going to be the right person on that position to take care.

**JT: Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you would like to include in your interview?**

Not really because most of the things, you guys asked me, and I gave it to you guys. It's very important. I never think about it. I thought this is going to be short, but...

**ALL: Thank you.**

You're welcome. Anytime.

**[End of recorded interview]**