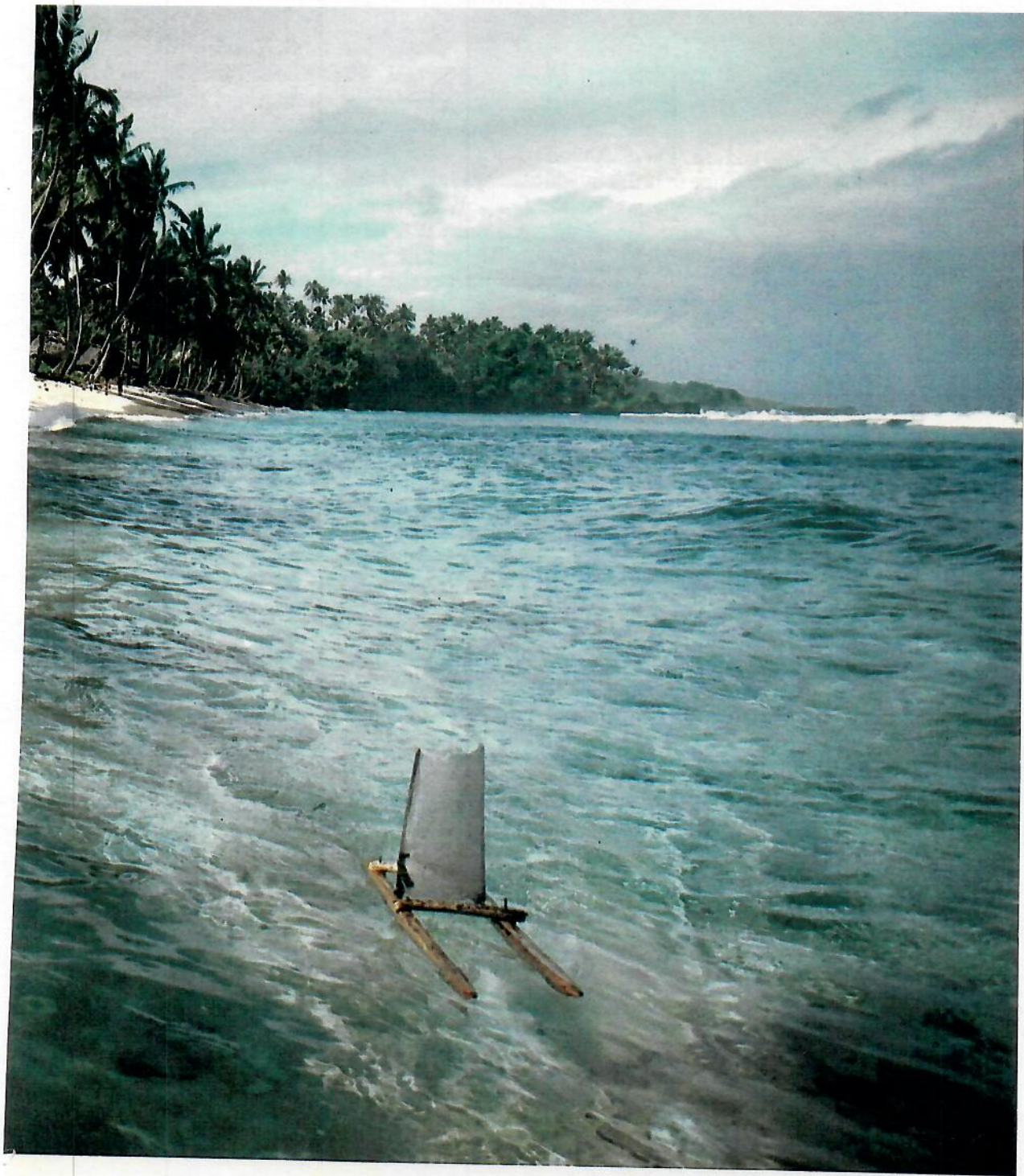


THE TWO SAMOAS STILL COMING OF AGE

By ROBERT BOOTH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SENIOR STAFF



United by culture, Western Samoa and American Samoa are separated by politics. U. S. aid pampers American Samoa, but the lure of the South Pacific emanates more strongly from Western Samoa's Savai'i, where a boy sails a double-hulled canoe reminiscent of those of his Polynesian ancestors. The H.M.S. Pandora sailed to the islands searching for Bounty mutineers, and here Margaret Mead made her famous observations of adolescents.

Photographs by MELINDA BERGE



IT WAS ALMOST MIDNIGHT when the moon at last escaped the cloud-capped mountain and turned its full glory on the sand and sea. The disembodied roar of surf became a line of brilliant white, marking the coral reef 200 yards offshore. A

American Samoa

air. This was Samoa! The earthly paradise proclaimed by author and anthropologist; the cradle of Polynesia, where care-free brown-skinned people laughed and splashed and made love all the day long.

Well, maybe this had been Samoa. And maybe some of it still was. But. . . .

But now the delightful aroma of fish grilling atop coconut-shell embers distracted me. The small red fish, called *malau*, had been minding their own business just minutes before. And the green bananas baking deeper in the coals were hardly older.

warm breeze stirred the coconut palms, their long fronds shadowboxing on the sparkling beach.

I took a deep breath of soft island

My host, High Chief Tauli'ili, handed me a brimming coconut and motioned me toward a banana-leaf platter piled high with fish and fruit. "This beats the microwave," he said.

We were on the tiny island of Ofu, one of three that form the Manu'a group, part of American Samoa, a United States territory. The capital, Pago Pago (pronounced PAHNG-o PAHNG-o), lay 60 sea miles to the west on the main island of Tutuila. Farther west still was Western Samoa, which became the South Pacific's first small island nation in 1962 (map, below).

One people, two Samoas, carved up by colonial powers at the turn of the century. Though charting different courses, both Samoas remain jealous of their 2,000-year-old culture, and—in pursuit of progress—both inevitably compromise it.

Not too surprisingly the 20th century, for good or ill, has collided hardest with American Samoa. In the past six years alone, the territory, with a population of 35,000, has received nearly 250 million dollars in federal funds. Most of those megabucks stayed on



WESTERN SAMOA

AREA: 2,849 sq km (1,100 sq mi).
POPULATION: 162,000. **CAPITAL:** Apia, pop. 35,000. **RELIGION:** Protestant, Roman Catholic. **LANGUAGE:** Samoan, English. **ECONOMY:** Agriculture: coconuts, cacao, taro.



FA'A SAMOA—the Samoan way of thinking and doing—has prescribed the rituals for social conduct for centuries. On American Samoa, the Samoan way collides with fa'a America (above) as a group of break dancers called the Famous Original Blood Brothers of Samoa perform in Fagatogo.

The U. S. Navy established a station in Pago Pago in 1900, when American Samoa became a United States possession. Western Samoa, once a German colony and later a mandate of New Zealand, achieved independence in 1962. It is listed by the United Nations as one of the least developed countries in the world.



AMERICAN SAMOA

AREA: 197 sq km (76 sq mi).
POPULATION: 35,000. **PRINCIPAL CITY:** Pago Pago, pop. 3,075.
RELIGION: Protestant, Roman Catholic.
LANGUAGE: Samoan, English.
ECONOMY: Industry: Fish canning.

TUTUILA TO SWAINS ISLAND
225 MILES

TA'U TO ROSE AND SAND ISLANDS
90 MILES



OFU
Ofu

OLOSEGA

MANU'A ISLANDS

CORAL REEF
TA'U

I N D I A N O C E A N

TV, beer, and a VCR are taken for granted by a family in Faga'alu. Nearly half the American Samoan work force is employed by the local government. The U. S. pumps millions into the economy.

Tutuila. Manu'a, still relatively remote, has seen fewer changes.

It was for that reason 60 years ago that a young anthropologist named Margaret Mead chose Manu'a for her research. In her famous book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, she concluded that Samoan society in general and adolescent sexuality in particular were essentially stress free, and that stress in American society must therefore be a product of nurture, not nature. Her work has recently been disputed by other anthropologists, and Samoans themselves are divided about it.

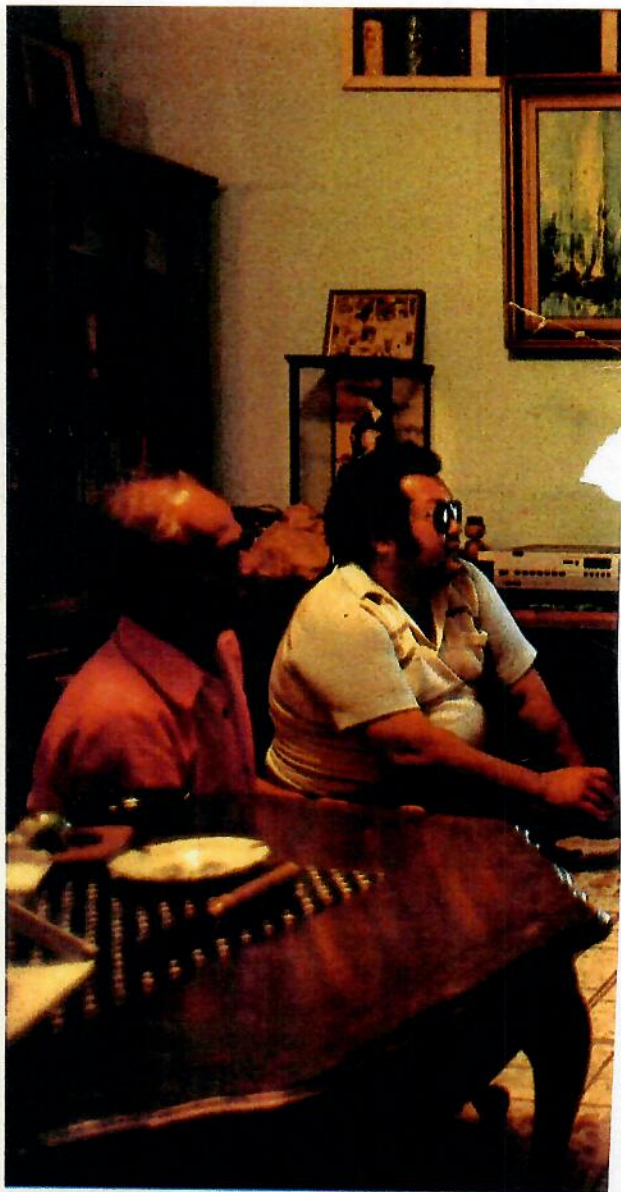
But even Manu'a has undergone something of a transformation. "It has come very fast," said Tauili'ili, known as Ili to his friends. Now 42, he was installed as the *matai*, or chief, of his extended family at the young age of 33.

"I was nine when my grandfather took me to Tutuila and I saw my first car. 'What's that,' I asked him, 'a large pig?' From here to Tutuila was a big step." After finishing high school, Ili returned to Ofu to join the *'aumaga*, the young men who serve the matai.

"Life was hard, but to me it was fun," he said. "Go up the mountain and work the plantation [in Samoa any cultivated plot large or small is called a plantation]; in the evening, paddle the canoe out and fish.

"There was no electricity in those days; kerosene was our light. Money wasn't common then, and we didn't have any use for it. We had our own food and everything we needed. And the customs were still strong."

Traditional Samoan society is both communal and authoritarian. Each village is composed of one or more *'aiga*, or extended families, some numbering hundreds of members. Each *'aiga* chooses its matai. Communal land is vested in the matai, who oversees its distribution. Matai belong to the village *fono*, or council, which sets policy and adjudicates grievances and once held the power of life and death.



"Today," continued Ili, "the younger generation has more knowledge of the outside. Fewer and fewer are looking to the land. They are dreaming of how to get money in their pockets. I am trying to think ahead, to see what we can do to match the times. The matai system has to change; it has to provide new solutions for new problems. But it will never disappear."

UNLIKE the traditional thatched-roof *fale*, open on all sides and bare but for woven floor mats, Ili's house in Ofu village, like those of many neighbors, was well furnished, had a solid roof, and doors and windows that locked—a so-called *fale palagi* (FAH-leh pah-LAHNG-ee).



Palagi is a form of *papalagi*, which means “sky burster”—the name given to the strange white men whose impossibly tall ships rent the horizon 250 years ago.

The first was Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen in 1722, though he passed by without landing. Half a century later the Frenchman Louis-Antoine de Bougainville arrived. According to one account, he found the people “less trusting than the Tahitians; they displayed no eagerness to get iron. But their canoes were skillfully made, with triangular sails, and followed the ships a good distance out to sea, [sailing] round them as easily as if they had been at anchor.” De Bougainville was impressed, and named the islands Les Îles des Navigateurs.

But surely the most influential palagi arrival was the Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society, who sailed into Samoan life in 1830 and changed it forever. As one contemporary Samoan put it, “The missionaries came here to do a job, and by God they did one!” Today every village has a church, often several. They are always the largest buildings, and pastors nearly always live in the largest homes.

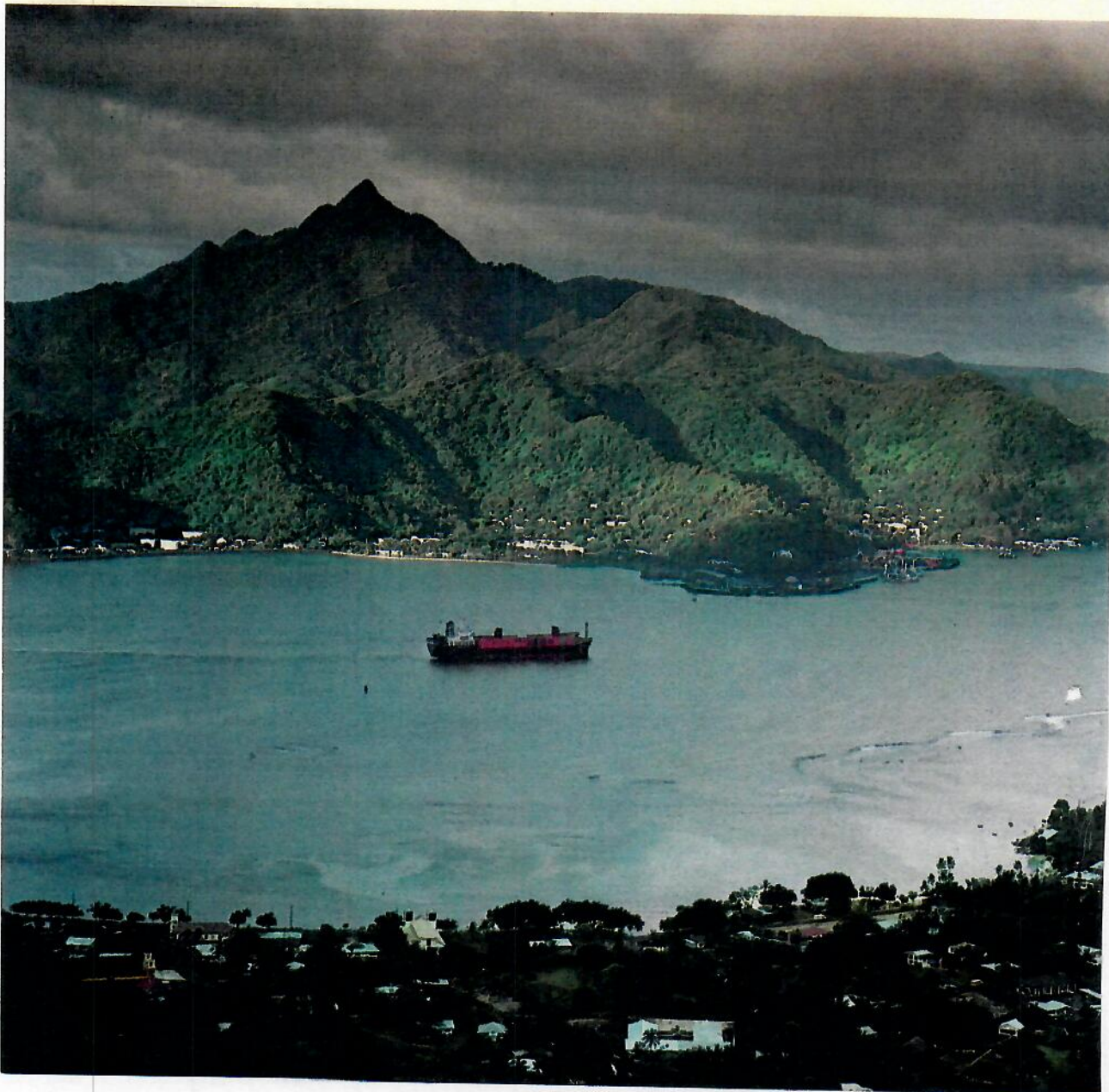
The last bell was still ringing in my ears as Ili and I slid into a pew in Ofu Congregational Church, bright and airy, with beautiful woodwork detailing. As the organ started up, the people swung into effortless four-part harmony. Samoans love to sing, and they sing loud and well.

This was the Sunday when a collection was taken for the pastor's monthly salary. Toward the end of the service, as is the custom, a deacon rose and read out the names of the donors and how much each had given. The total came to \$3,200. Later Ili told me that the pastor's house and food were provided by the village. "I don't know what he does with the money," he said. "There are people here who have a monthly income of \$200 and give the pastor half of that."

I spoke with the Samoan pastor, a Reverend Salatielu, a burly man in his 60s. His father and grandfather had been preachers before him. He liked Ofu. "The people are very generous," he said.

THE NEXT DAY I bade Ili *tofa* and boarded a boat for Tutuila. Seven hours later we nosed into Pago Pago's bay. Most imposing of the islands, Tutuila rises abruptly from the sea like the fabled Bali Hai. It is stunningly green; the bay area averages 200 inches of rain a year.

The bay, which nearly splits Tutuila in two, is actually the caldera from a series of prehistoric eruptions (all the islands are volcanic). The harbor, one of the deepest and best protected in the Pacific, was what originally drew U. S. interest and impelled the Navy to open a coaling depot here around 1900. In 1951 the Navy turned the territory over to the Department of the Interior.



Today the harbor remains central to the economy. The north shore is dominated by two tuna canneries, Starkist and Chicken of the Sea, that are the mainstays of the private sector. They get tax breaks (or they'd have to leave, they say), but they do employ 3,000 people, most of them Western Samoan aliens who will work for the \$2.82 minimum wage. This year the canneries will ship 250 million dollars' worth of tuna home to the U. S., one-fifth of all consumed.

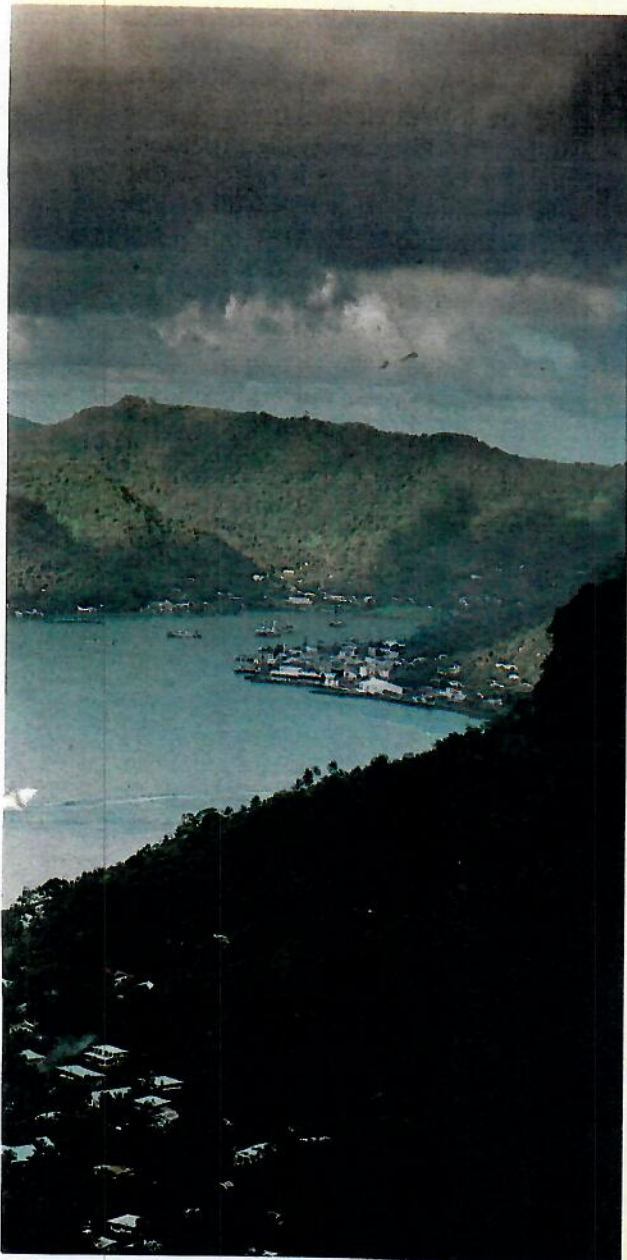
On a spit of land near the harbor mouth, the 200-room Rainmaker Hotel sits across from the magnificent hulking mountain for which it is named. The rooms are only adequate, and the kitchen seems never to have

heard of local fish or produce, but the view is great and the cheeseburgers aren't bad.

Most food on this island is imported, because most Tutuilans no longer live off the land. And why should they? Nearly half the workers hold well-paying jobs in the local government. They may raise some taro and bananas, but mainly they stop by the supermarket on their way home from the office. Most households have color TVs and VCRs, and many people own cars.

There are some 50 miles of paved road on Tutuila—and 4,000 vehicles. Usually half are trying to get into Pago Pago while the other half try to get out. Gridlock in paradise.

The main road runs right by the hotel, a



Guarded by Matafao, a peak 2,142 feet high, Pago Pago's deep sheltered harbor (left) lies within an ancient caldera. A Taiwanese long-liner in dry dock (above) takes a respite from pursuing tuna, the island's chief export.

short walk from the business district. Like most villages, Pago Pago is squeezed between mountain and sea. In fact only 2 percent of bay-area land is level enough to build on. You stroll past the sprawling container dock, stacked three and four high, and realize there's nowhere else to put them. Farther along is a small museum with thatched fale outside, preserved for tourists. Inside, I don't know; the air conditioner was broken, so the museum was closed.

On the landward side of the street a modern two-story mall houses a score of shops and offices. Most of the other downtown buildings are relics from the Navy days. One such is the former boardinghouse in which slatternly Sadie Thompson seduced the self-righteous Reverend Davidson in Somerset Maugham's 1920 short story "Rain."

"Davidson was real, and so was Sadie Thompson," said Joe Theroux. "She lived here and [played] around quite a bit." We were talking over dinner at Soli and Mark's, Pago Pago's best restaurant. Theroux, 33 and stocky, with a thick mustache and a salty tongue, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Western Samoa ten years ago before coming here to teach. Like his (temporarily) better known brother, Paul, Joe is an author.

"The missionaries have gotten a raw deal," he was saying, "because people think of Davidson. I've met some great missionaries, honest to God."

I asked him about rich Samoan pastors. "Samoans have 'samoanized' Christianity," he explained. "The pastor has become a chief—a religious chief. He gets paid because he is a man of rank."

"Look at Samoan cricket," he continued. "It is unrecognizable to a British cricketer. If your team loses, you can buy your way back into the tournament. And don't play checkers with Samoans. They can jump backward when they're not kinged. They can jump over the whole *board*. You say, 'I've never played like this.' They say, 'This is Samoan checkers.' They've done the same thing with Christianity."

THEY'VE ALSO DONE the same thing with American-style government. The governor and 21-seat House of Representatives are elected, but the 18 senators are chiefs, selected, following Samoan tradition, by other chiefs. That doesn't sit well with 35-year-old former Representative Letalu Moliga.

"Our traditions should be practiced by the individual, by the family, by the village, but not by the government," he said, "because of the conflict with participatory democracy. I hear our leaders talking about preserving our culture. We need to think about what we are preserving and what we really want to preserve."

One of those leaders is Peter Tali Coleman, the governor who was first appointed in the 1950s and finished serving his second elected term last year. "I disagree that the matai system should stay out of politics," he said. "In my assessment, there is far more wisdom in the Senate than in that free-for-all in the House."

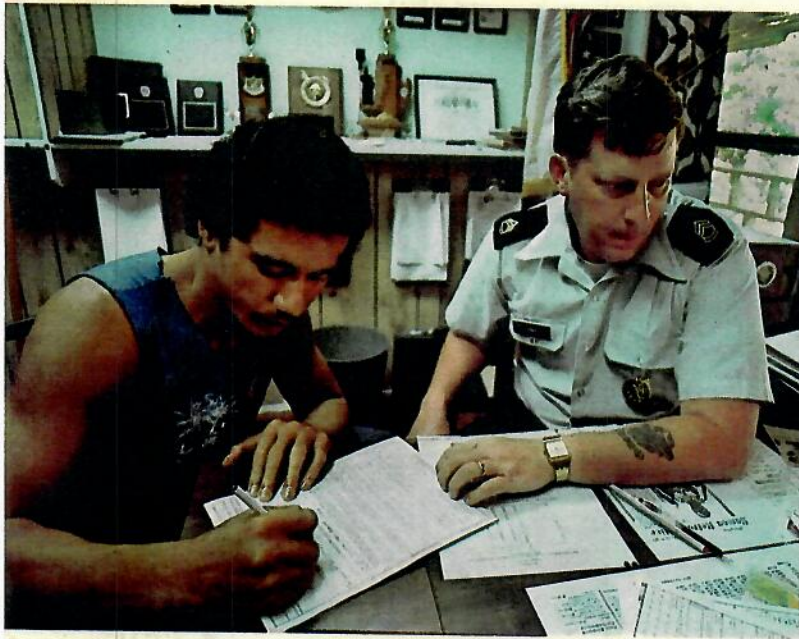
"And certainly, one of the most important challenges we face is the protection of our traditions. Among some of our younger people today there is a restlessness—an impatience with our system. But it has served us well for a long time."

I did hear frequent grumbling during my weeks in American Samoa, though usually affectionate and not exclusively by the younger generation: "We are an unimaginative, self-satisfied bunch of idiots!" exclaimed John Kneubuhl, 65, a retired writer and educator and now the territory's unofficial historian.

To visit with John, I had driven out the main road to the village of Taputimu. Winding along the coast, I passed a group of boys selling octopus, still dripping wet from the sea. Where there were breaks in the reef, big Pacific rollers, heaped up by the stiff trade winds, slammed into the rocky shore, sending spray above the palms. In Nu'uuli I passed the boutique that had sponsored the first island break-dance contest a few days

Bursting into exuberant dance, cannery workers—one wearing part of a sign as a collar—celebrate a vote against unionizing the Starkist tuna factory in Pago Pago. Most of the workers come from Western Samoa; the \$2.82 cannery minimum wage is too low to attract their American Samoan kin.





Signing up for U. S. Army enlistment, Michael Pale Taamilo (left) in Pago Pago joins the exodus of young people leaving the islands. Football, with its promise of a scholarship to a stateside school, provides another way out; high-school teams tangle in a downpour in Leone (below). Mosi Tatupu, running back for the New England Patriots, and Jack Thompson, "the Throwin' Samoan," a quarterback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, made it big.



earlier, and across the road, the Matai's Piza Fale.

"I don't think the matai system is going to last very much longer," said John, after we had made ourselves comfortable in his living room. "For one thing, there are too damn many of them now. That's cheapened the system. And centralized government is killing their power.

"In premissionary days the chiefs' word was final. They could be terribly cruel. Just a few months before John Williams landed, one of the most powerful chiefs in Samoan history took his army from 'Upolu to Savai'i [the main islands of Western Samoa] to attack another important family. The night before the attack they were resting in a village, and he saw a beautiful little girl, eight or ten years old. He said to his men, 'Prepare

her for me.' You might think it was sexual. No. She was roasted. He ate her. But his warriors became disgusted and clubbed him to death."

As the afternoon wore on, I asked John about the possibility of the two Samoas becoming one. "We all want reunification, I think," he said, "though it's a great question whether Samoa was ever unified. Tutuila was a subdivision of a district on 'Upolu; it was a place of exile. But Manu'a was never part of a historical Samoa.

"As it stands, American Samoa would have very little to offer. We are a hand-out society; we have no resources. 'Upolu and Savai'i are potentially wealthy islands. Savai'i is huge, and people forget that 'Upolu is nearly the size of Oahu and every bit as blessed in natural fertility."

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PPOTENTIALLY WEALTHY, perhaps, but right now Western Samoa is classified by the United Nations as a least developed country, thus placing it among the poorest in the world.

Western Samoa

The flight from Tutuila to 'Upolu's expanded Faleolo airport takes only half an hour. The 20-mile drive to the capital of Apia takes longer. The first thing you notice is a lot fewer cars on the road and a lot more people—and chickens and pigs. You also notice the preponderance of traditional thatched-roof fale. All of which says more about the state of the economy than about preservation of the culture. And you notice the churches: Dozens of them line the road to the capital.

It's not really fair to compare Apia and Pago Pago, simply because Apia is so much larger. With 35,000 people (equal to the entire population of American Samoa), Apia feels like a small city. Like Pago Pago, its main avenue curves around a crescent-shaped harbor. Western Samoa's economy,

however, doesn't lie in its harbor, though some of its history does.

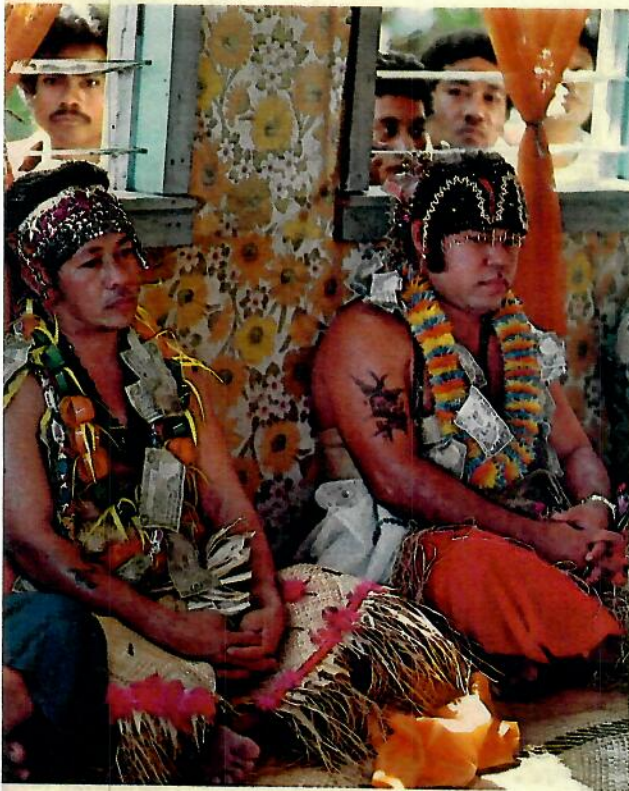
In March 1889, Germany, Britain, and the United States were about to come to blows over these islands. Seven warships lay at anchor, tensing their muscles. Then the barometer began to fall. It fell to 29.11 before the hurricane struck.

Six ships—three German and three American—went down. Only the British *Calliope*, which had put to sea in the teeth of the storm, managed to escape. In the sobering calm after the catastrophe, the three powers agreed to agree. Eventually Britain bowed out, the U. S. got the eastern islands, and Germany the western.

That's how things stood until World War I, when a New Zealand force landed and arrested the German nationals without a shot. New Zealand governed until January 1, 1962. On that day the Western Samoan flag flew over Apia for the first time.

Some people have called Apia cosmopolitan. Well, perhaps they were thinking of Aggie Grey's Hotel and of Aggie herself. Both certainly qualify.

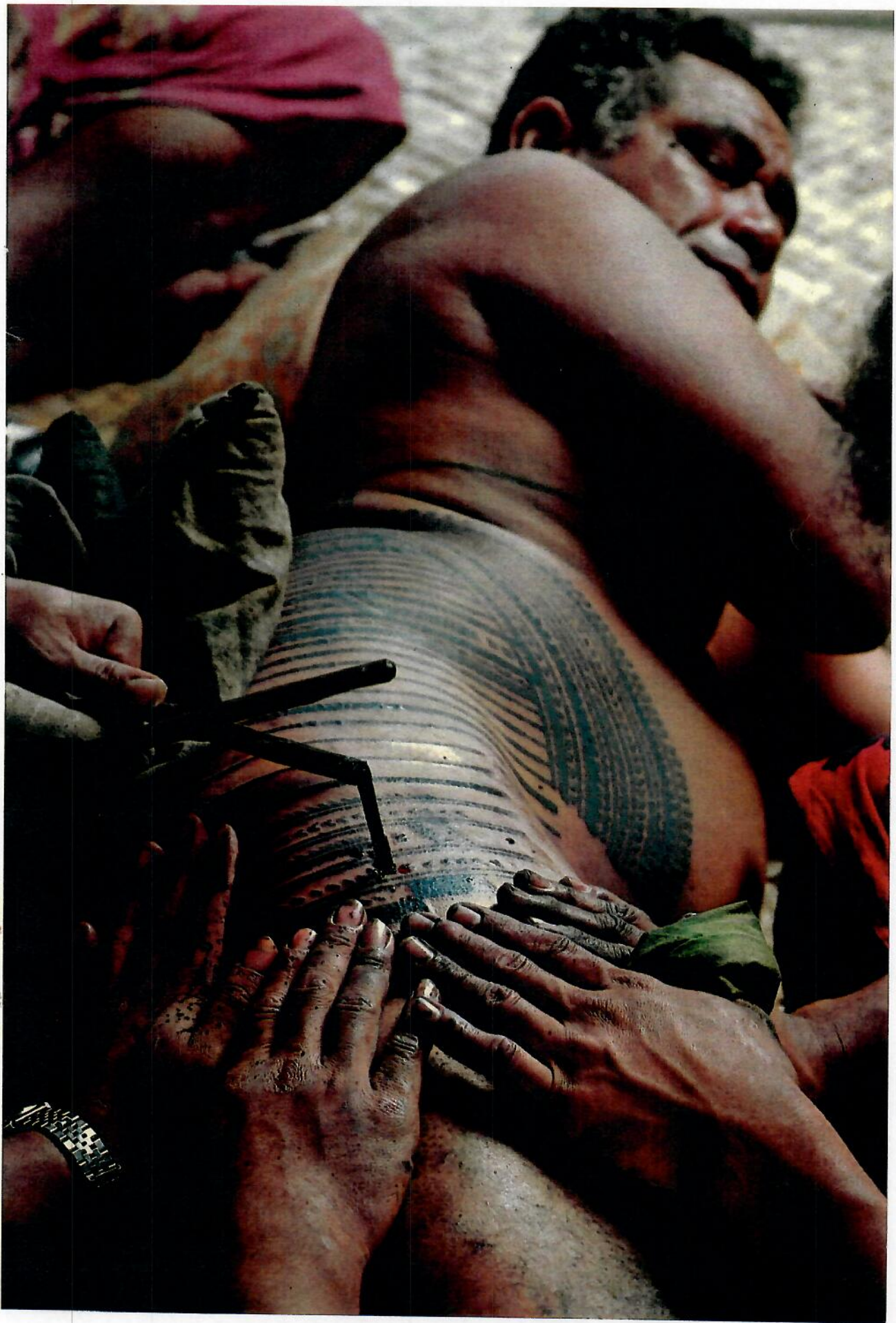
"After my second husband died in 1940, I



Designs for manhood and status: The tattooer's mallet sends needle-like slivers of a carved boar's tusk into the flesh of Pitoa'i Tupou, a matai, or chief (right), in the village of Faleasi'u on 'Upolu. Ink made from soot enhances the design.

A complete tattoo on the lower back and torso and upper thighs may take 18 hours, split into several sessions of skin-rending pain that islanders equate with childbirth. "For a whole month you are in pain," says a tattooed Samoan. "You walk like a hunchback. If you can take the pain of tattoo, you can overcome any hardship in your life."

At a saofa'i, or title-granting ceremony, at Apolimafofou, newly designated matai (left) wear 'ula, or leis, decorated with money from friends and family. Expected to look after the well-being of their 'aiga, or clans, matai have the power to grant land, mediate disputes, and banish recalcitrants.



The tall trees of 'Upolu shelter small farm plots, where the smoke from stone ovens on a Sunday morning hangs heavy as fog. Western Samoans live mainly by subsistence farming, largely abandoned by their cousins on American Samoa.

was left with seven children and very little money," said this 89-year-old grande dame of the Pacific, daughter of a Samoan mother and an English father. Aggie denies being James Michener's inspiration for the character of Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*.

"I bought some whiskey and made a little bar," she said. "A few tables, a few mats on the floor, a kitchen out back. And I started to put people up."

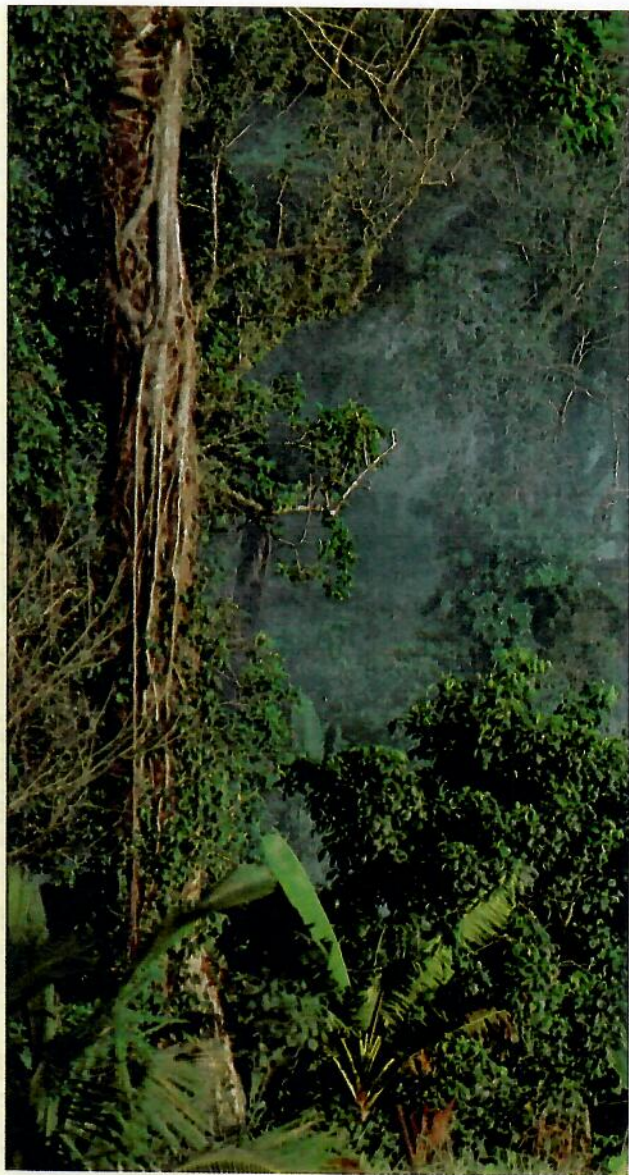
Today the hotel has 120 pleasant rooms encircling a lush tropical garden. The dining room serves the best food in Samoa, including such local dishes as *pakusami*—coconut cream baked in young taro leaves. After dinner Aggie often mingles with the guests and can be persuaded to dance the *siva*. "It makes me happy to dance. If I didn't, I think I'd be in a wheelchair."

Two years ago Aggie received a surprise from Queen Elizabeth: "When I read the letter that I was to get the QSO [Queen's Service Order], I nearly passed out. The New Zealand high commissioner came here and pinned me. We had a big party. The medal was so heavy, I said to him, 'You know I have only a small chest; now you flatten it more!' I always say what I think. That's my trouble.

"I'm frightened of the new airport," she told me. "The big planes with hundreds of people coming in—the island can't take them. This is a pretty little place. I don't want to see it spoiled."

Aggie is also disturbed by what she feels is a growing trend: "There are too many people sitting around relying on money from family overseas. They should be working the land."

So-called overseas remittances, 20 million dollars last year (much of it from American Samoa), are a big chunk of the economy. The country as a whole receives aid too—some 15 million dollars last year from a multitude of foreign sources. But the fact is that most people *are* working the land.



"**A**GRICULTURE is the backbone of our economy," said Prime Minister Tofi-lau Eti Alesana, a large cordial man.

"In 1984 our exports totaled 15 million dollars, three times the 1981 figure. Growers are getting more for their products, but the cost of living is going up. We need to stimulate foreign exchange. That means we must curb imports and export even more."

The government controls extensive tracts of cultivated land, mainly in coconuts and cacao. It also controls prices paid to small producers, most of whom farm at or just above the subsistence level. There are a growing number of progressive farmers, however, who look at farming as a business.

One of those is Birdsall Ala'ilima, who



works 350 acres in the remote eastern uplands of 'Upolu that his matai father cleared in the 1950s. Birdie and his wife, Marlène, and their four small children live in a frame house not far from spectacular 228-foot-high Sopo'aga Falls. Staying with the family when I visited was Birdie's sister Sisilia, a medical student at the University of Hawaii.

"Cattle used to be our mainstay," said Birdie, as he showed me around the plantation. "But we were having problems with theft. So now it's coconuts. We've been making copra recently," he said, pointing to the drying shed, "though we would prefer to deal in whole nuts.

"Economic planning by the government has been terrible. Two major industries here

are a cigarette factory and a brewery: The tobacco is all imported, and the ingredients for the beer are all imported. The government should be developing local industry to encourage local products. Like integrated processing of coconuts—using the whole nut, not just the meat."

Back at the house, he and Sisi expanded on the idea. "The technology has been around," said Sisi, "but Third World countries have been slow to exploit it. The husk makes coir fiber, twisted fiber used in car seats. The shells make high-quality activated charcoal—industry uses it in anti-pollution equipment. And coconut milk has potential as a carbonated beverage."

"The price for a nut now is six cents," said

Birdie. "With integrated processing it could be 14 cents."

The Ala'ilimas had started a petition among nearby villages in support of the idea and planned to present it to the government. "In this place," said Birdie, "it's hard to get action as an individual."

The petition is the first act of what they hope will be a national grass-roots farmers association. "People haven't been getting a fair price from the government," said Birdie. A newsletter would inform villages about prices, markets, and new techniques.

Sisi had taken a semester off to help form the association, yet sounded a note of reserve: "By giving this information to the villages, we are implying that their lives have been incomplete. But as far as they're concerned, their lives are complete and always have been. If government and progress just disappeared, the villages would survive. But the farmers should know their options and decide the future for themselves."

As soon as the association got on its feet, Sisi was going back to Hawaii but vowed to return and practice medicine in the villages. "The country has need of doctors," she said.

Sisi's return will be an exception to the rule. Thousands of people leave Western Samoa every year for American Samoa, New Zealand, and the U. S. While that migration offsets a high birthrate (nearly half the population is under 15), many who leave are educated young adults—the hope of the future. Returning physicians are especially welcome and equally rare.

"The average salary for doctors here is something like \$5,000 a year," said Director of Public Health Dr. Walter Vermeulen in his Apia office. "And we are at the top of the wage scale. That's not much motivation to come back. The sirens of affluence are very strong."

Vermeulen, a warm, graying man in his mid-40s, is Belgian by birth but married a Samoan and became a naturalized citizen.



Worship wears white on Sunday morning as women in flowing puletasi escort children to the Congregational church at Sapapali'i on Savai'i (above). Praying youngsters close their eyes in rapt concentration (right). Here the Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society landed in 1830 to bring Christianity to Samoans, now among the most fervent churchgoers in the world.

"We are basically a healthy country," he told me. "Our biggest problems are no longer the communicable diseases. We seem to be catching the diseases of the West, like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, ulcers. Food is one variable. People are relying more on imported food, much of it inferior—chicken backs, mutton flaps, low-grade corned beef—stuff that would never be eaten by most Americans."

One of the most alarming recent health trends is the high suicide rate among young people. It may well stem from the rather authoritarian life-style in the villages. "Typical," said Vermeulen, "is the son who has an altercation with his father and goes out and drinks weed killer. From the outside Samoa looks like a peaceful, pleasant society. Inwardly, we have conflicts."

But Vermeulen remains an optimist. "Samoa is blessed with a good climate and a healthy population," he said. "Poor but healthy. No one is farther than a 15-minute

drive from one of our health centers or district hospitals. That is true even for the most distant villages on Savai'i."

SAVAI'I. Samoa's big island, bigger than all the other islands combined. Some say it is the legendary Hawaiki, from which the great Polynesian navigators set sail to discover every habitable speck of land in the boundless mid-Pacific. It has been called the soul of Samoa. Here the 20th century has put down the shallowest roots, and the *fa'a Samoa*—the Samoan way—has the most meaning.

The ferry to Savai'i is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, I was told. That is, you should experience it once and only once. But it wasn't all that bad. The World War II landing craft had room for half a dozen vehicles, including my rental car, along with maybe 50 people and their assorted animals. We plowed across the potentially ferocious 13-mile channel in relative calm.



The Two Samoas



Until fairly recently, travel on Savai'i was restricted to either walking or paddling, but Australia put up the money and the expertise for paving a road around the island. When the ferry docked at Salelologa, I headed counterclockwise.

Savai'i has the feel of a large landmass. At its center is 6,095-foot Mount Silisili, highest point of all the islands, but the ground slopes so gradually that you don't notice it.

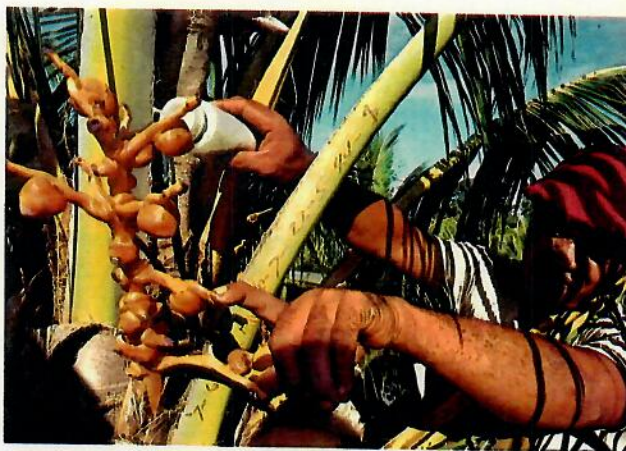
As I drove through village after village, I caught glimpses of Samoan life: boys returning from the plantation, weighted down with baskets full of coconuts; older men gathered in a fale, sitting cross-legged with their backs against the support poles—village chiefs, debating the day's business. In other fale I saw women tirelessly plaiting pandanus mats. Farther on, a group of men were fishing in a lagoon, beating the water as they converged on a central point. In one village a wedding was in progress, with much singing and dancing and exchanges of food and fine mats, the intricately woven units of ceremonial currency.

In many villages the *malae*, or town common, had become an athletic field, where young men were playing volleyball or cricket or rugby. Young Samoan men are seemingly always big and powerfully built. Dressed in their waist-to-knee wraparound skirts called *lavalava*, they look about as effeminate as the Los Angeles Raiders. Several Samoans, in fact, play professional football in the U. S.

Before rounding the island's northeast corner, the road cuts inland and crosses a bleak expanse of lava from the most recent eruption, which ended in 1911. Here and there a few green shoots poked up defiantly.

THE PAVEMENT temporarily runs out at the tiny north coast village of Manase. There Chief Taito Muese and his wife, Rasela, invited me to spend the night. They didn't speak much English, and I spoke less Samoan, but never was I made to feel more welcome.

Sixteen-year-old Auckland, one of four daughters and six sons, took me for a walk along a picture-postcard beach. Her English was unmistakable: "I want to get far away from Samoa," she said. Why, I asked her. "There is no money here," she replied.



Dexterous fingers weave pandanus leaves into fine mats (facing page, foreground) for ceremonial gifts. Fare for a feast (above) includes—clockwise from the roast pig—bananas, corned beef, breadfruit, palusami, or coconut cream baked in taro leaves, taro, opened palusami, fish, cocoa, and coconut.

A technician (top) dusts flowers of a coconut palm with pollen from Solomon Islands trees to produce a more fruitful strain. The United Nations Development Programme helps fund the project to bolster Western Samoa's economy.

At dawn I rose to watch the boys prepare the *umu*, or stone oven. After being heated white-hot in a coconut-shell fire, the fist-size stones were mounded together with taro and bananas; breadfruit and leaf-wrapped fish and palusami were placed on top. In an hour all was ready.

Taito and I ate first, as is customary. In Samoan fashion we sat on the floor and ate with our fingers. Fourteen-year-old Tivoli fanned flies from our plates, and another child brought finger bowls.

I ended up staying that day and night with Taito and his family, and set out again the following morning. On the southwest coast, at Fagafau, I passed a notorious lover's leap, still used occasionally, I was told. At the bottom of the vertical cliff it was not uncommon to see sharks slowly patrolling back and forth. At the village of Taga I turned the last major corner and headed for a shower and a hot meal at the Safua Hotel not far from the ferry landing.

The Safua is a charming cluster of ten private fale surrounding a large central sitting and dining area. The nightly buffet rivals Aggie Grey's. The hotel was designed and built by Moelagi Jackson and her late husband. "Now that my husband is gone, I have to widen my shoulders," she said. An articulate, no-nonsense woman, quick to smile, Moelagi holds the high title of Vaasiliifiti. Of 20,000 matai in Western Samoa, she is one of only 100 titled women.

"I am not worried about Savai'i being spoiled by tourism," she said. "If too many palagi lodge in villages, that will tend to hurt. But if we have a few small hotels, the tourists will come and go, and Savai'i will be the same.

"Samoans are a proud people," she said. "Look at what's happened to the Hawaiians and the rest of Polynesia. We still have our system. We have our language. And we have our land. You cannot sell communal land. As long as the land is held by the people, there will not be dramatic changes. They will take a long, long time."

The next day I said farewell to Savai'i and boarded the ferry for 'Upolu. My time

in Samoa was growing short, but I had one more appointment to keep.

OF ALL the paradise-starved palagi who ever found their way to these islands, Robert Louis Stevenson is held dearest in Samoan memory. He was already a famous man, author of *Treasure Island* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, when he arrived in 1889. He was ill, however, and had come, "only to grow old and die, but . . . it is a fair place for the purpose."

Stevenson built his home on the slopes of Mount Vaea, a few miles outside Apia. And his health improved: "I can walk," he wrote, "I can ride, I am up with the sun." As time passed, he developed a close bond with the Samoans. "I love the land," he told them, "and I love the people." They called him Tusitala—teller of tales.

He died suddenly, on December 3, 1894, at the age of 44. His Samoan friends worked around the clock hacking a path to the summit, where, as he had wished, they buried him.

In the cool of the morning I set out to visit his tomb. At first the trail climbed gently, past an occasional coconut palm ("that giraffe of vegetables," wrote Stevenson), but soon it steepened, switchbacking upward through the thick mountain rain forest. Small black lizards scattered from the path.

After about an hour I emerged on the summit. In the center of a clearing lay the simple limestone tomb. Far below, beyond the distant church towers of Apia, beyond the white fringe of reef, two tugboats were standing out from the harbor entrance, waiting to greet a cargo ship just coming into view. It was a marvelous panorama.

I turned to the tomb. Engraved on one face was Stevenson's poignant elegy, which ends with these lines:

*Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.*

I lingered with the Tusitala for a few minutes more, then started back down the mountain. □

"The first love, the first sunrise, the first South Sea Island are memories apart," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, whose tomb lies atop Mount Vaea on 'Upolu.

