

AIONO DR. FANAIFI LE TAGALOA
AUTHORITY ON SAMOAN
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE



"Success on any level demands commitment and dedication," is a statement characteristic of the lady whom all of Samoa must proudly boast as the champion of the Samoan Language Program and Policy enacted into statute in the early 1960s by the Western Samoa Parliamentary Assembly. Convinced of the vital importance and need to maintain and perpetuate the indigenous culture of Samoa, Aiono Dr. Fanaifi Le Tagaloa formulated and implemented a complete and comprehensive bilingual-bicultural program of instruction for school children during her tenure as Director of Education for the Government of Western Samoa. It was especially critical that this be accomplished and made the law of the land as Western Samoa emerged out of colonial experience into independence in the early 1960s. Implementation and expansion of the program has continued since that time throughout the entire public school system and parochial schools of Western Samoa.

Fanaifi, as she is affectionately referred to and called by her close associates and friends, was born in Western Samoa on June 25, 1932, and is the product of an impressive array of schooling and training opportunities, which began with her own island country's Malifa Primary School in Apia, Western Samoa. She then journeyed to New Zealand to attend intermediate and grammar schools there. In 1954, she received her Teacher "C" Certificate from Ardmore Teachers' College, Ardmore, New Zealand. She returned home briefly to teach at Malifa Primary and Leifiifi Intermediate Schools. However, a burning desire to further her intellectual training and development found her once again back in New Zealand, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1957, and subsequently an M.A. degree at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Perhaps the greatest, most challenging and fulfilling opportunity in her educational development was her acceptance into the University of London in Great Britain for her doctoral studies. She was the first Pacific Islander to have been awarded the prestigious and professional "MacKintosh Travelling Scholarship" offered annually to New Zealand scholars on the basis of outstanding academic achievement at the graduate level. This unique opportunity to study in London, the first for any

student and scholar from Samoa, absorbed all her energy and interest, and after 2 years of diligent studies she became the proud recipient in 1960 of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree, Teachers "A" Certificate from the University of London, London, Great Britain. Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagalao made a place for women in the history books of the Pacific.

On her way home to be of service to her people, she stopped off in New Zealand and taught education philosophy and theory courses at Victoria University in Wellington for 4 years. She was Principal of the Western Samoa Teachers' College in 1965, and after a brief term as Deputy Director of Education she was promoted and appointed the Director of Education for the Western Samoa Government. She held the post of Directorship with deep commitment and dedication from December, 1968, until March, 1975. The Congregational Christian Church in Samoa employed her services as its Director of Education for its school system from 1976 to 1981. She became Vice Chancellor of the University of Samoa from 1982 until 1985, she herself being a dominant figure in the establishment and development of this institution.

Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagalao's contribution to the development of her people is extensive and indeed laudatory. She has earned nothing short of the greatest admiration, respect, and appreciation of her country. She was clearly the pillar of strength in educational growth and development in her island nation as it developed for over three decades, a young and independent island country in the vast Pacific.

She is without a doubt one of the most intellectually impressive women of the Pacific Basin, doggedly determined yet understanding and respectful of others' views. Her published Master's thesis: The Pattern of Education and the Factors Influencing That Development in the New Zealand Dependencies in the Pacific, and her doctoral dissertation, Bilingualism and Its Socio-Economic and Philosophical Implications in a Society Forced to Be Bilingual, have been widely read, especially by leaders in the linguistics and cultural maintenance scenarios of the Pacific. Among her other published writings are her papers on "The Status and Roles of Females in Traditional and Modern Samoa" (UNESCO 1986), "The Samoan Lady in Society and as a Healer," "The Economic Roles of Females in Samoan Society," "The Social Structure of the Samoan Village," and "Curriculum Plan for the University of South Pacific," (USP 1968).

Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagalao is a shining example of a woman who, sufficiently and equally challenged, rose to prominence in her chosen field, even without sacrificing the joys of marriage, home and children. She raised four beautiful children, the oldest of whom, a son, is a medical doctor -- a graduate of Otago University Medical School in New Zealand. The second oldest, a daughter, is a third year medical student, also at Otago University in New Zealand.

In her active life as a public servant where she ably demonstrated that she can be a leader and a follower as well, she grew to be politically dynamic. She was recently elected a member of Parliament of the Government of Western Samoa where she is enjoying the role of a

politician and continues to champion the cause of the maintenance and perpetuation of Samoan cultural and language institutions. As an authority on Samoan language and culture, she is co-founder of a newly formed Society on Cultural Institutions--a non-political, non-sectarian, and non-governmental forum in which ways for development, maintenance, and preservation of cultural and language activities of the Samoan people are openly explored, discussed, and sought after.

Fanaafi is married to the Honorable Le Tagaloa Pita, who is himself a member of Parliament and Minister for Economic Affairs, Trade, Commerce, Industries, Tourism, Statistics, Post Office, Telecommunications and Broadcasting.

Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagaloa is living proof that it is indeed no longer a myth for a woman to combine the demands of challenging work and family life.