

## Chapter 13

**“A ‘shy kid’ now inspires others,”**

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**By Pat Ashby (good friend of Diane)**

“I think any shy kid with just a touch of talent and a strong desire will grow far more than the talented person who won’t put forth any effort,” Skyline High School’s drama teacher Tom Stokoe’s voice is commanding and he speaks with a slight but delightful English accent.

His voice has not always been commanding.

“Times have changed,” Tom said. “As a boy I went to school on an island in Samoa. Everybody wore uniforms, a yellow shirt with a badge on the pocket and light brown lava-lava or short pants.”

Tom chose short pants.

“It was a disgrace if the clothes were wrinkled. If a button was missing we were sent home from school”

Tom started school in New Zealand at age 5, but his family moved to Western Samoa when he was eleven. It was British territory and they believed in corporal punishment. You were hit with a cane if you broke one or more of the major rules or regulations.

“There were seven classes, he said, “and if you flunked one class in seven you repeated the entire year.”

“When we went to school,” Tom says, “there were no buses. Everyone went barefoot. I walked ten miles to school daily. One friend got up at 4 a.m. every morning to walk to school. The majority of the students didn’t eat breakfast, kids were constantly looking for food. If someone had a loaf of bread he was most popular.”

Tom was so skinny in school the girls called him “Worm.”

“All the public schools started out with prayer. Every morning we stood by our desks and bowed our heads and sang the Lord’s Prayer in Samoan.”

By the time Stokoe was 16 he was a Prefect. . . that was a school officer who enforced the school rules. Every second Friday they had an assembly. The Samoans loved skits, especially comedy that was bilingual. The entire school would assemble for the programs. The classes marched around like platoons in the army, if anyone was out of step or talked in rank they were caned. Students marched into the hall and stood at attention until the head master was greeted. “Good morning Mr. Smith.” Then he would say, “good morning students. Be seated.” Students sat cross-legged on mats on the floor.

Mr. Stokoe said, “It was customary to begin an assembly by reading a few passages from the Bible. The Prefects took turns and I will never forget the day it was my turn. I spoke both English and Samoan. I wasn’t fluent at either, so when I started to read it was halting. I was nervous and scared, I stammered and stuttered. I didn’t have a big voice.”

Getting into rank to march back to class my Geography teacher, a very good teacher, sort of half smiling said to me, “Before you have the audacity to insult the good Lord’s book again, learn how to read.”

“I half chuckled, but I knew he was right. I decided from that day forward no one would ever say that to me again. I wanted to read well.”

“The school performed a cutting from “Macbeth” but after my reading I was not invited to participate.”

“My first opportunity came when they needed someone who could speak English to emcee a variety show. English was my native language, so I got the job. The Samoans didn’t think much of my jokes but from time to time a U.S. Navy Ship came into harbor and the captain would bring the men to watch our show. The Americans laughed at my jokes and so it was a positive experience.”

“In order to pass a class a final test score of 60 out of a possible 100 was needed. In my final Science test I received a 58. I had to repeat the entire school year over again but it was a profitable year.”

Each quarter the whole school would go on a picnic. Everyone sang or danced, played guitars or ukuleles. It was a disgrace if we didn't know how to sing or dance. I didn't know how to dance. . . so I learned to be a musician so I wouldn't have to dance.”

“After I finished high school I thought I would spend the rest of my life on a plantation growing bananas, but a lady missionary encouraged me to go to college. In order to go to college I needed a transcript of my grades but the British school system didn't keep grades, you either passed or failed. I had to go to another high school for six months to get a transcript. It was at this school I had a major role in “Student Prince.” One of the teachers volunteered to give me vocal lessons to help with the part.”

After Tom enrolled at the Church College in Hawaii he found he didn't have enough money for the fare. His mother had a farewell feast and because it was the custom to give a small gift of money at the feast he received enough money for his passage.

Tom earned 75 cents an hour as a gardener in Hawaii. He was very proud because 75 cents was what you'd earn all day in Samoa.

His friends encouraged him to go into drama. “I considered it he said, “because I certainly wasn't an outstanding rugby player. I tried not to major in drama though, because I knew there was no money in it.”

Eventually he left Hawaii, went to B.Y.U., then to Utah State where he graduated in history and drama.

“I tried out for a lot of plays, the more plays I was in the more I improved,” Tom said.

He performed in every play he tried out for.

“When I received an assistantship at Southern Illinois University I didn’t have time for plays. One day, one of my roommates named Bob, who was in theater, insisted we watch the auditions for “The Mad Woman of Chaillot.” There were 300 people waiting to audition. A girl handed us a casting sheet. I said, “I’m not going to audition.”

“Oh yes you are,” my roommate said. He was 6 foot 6 inches, muscular like a tackle for the Green Bay Packers. I didn’t argue.

Tom thought they would never have time to audition him anyway. Within five minutes the director, Dr. Williams, who had been a Broadway actress, called “Tom Stokoe. Tom Stokoe!”

“Five of us auditioned. I had never seen the play but my voice was in good shape because I had spent the summer playing Shakespeare in Cedar City. We read. Then the director came down the aisle and had me read alone three times. The third time I read it with a southern accent, something I had never tried before, and I could hear my roommate laughing his head off.”

“Then the director said, “Just read as though you had an American accent.” “She then paid me the greatest compliment of my life.”

She said, “You have the part.”

Tom questioned her about auditioning others.

“I can recognize a leading man when I hear one,” she said, “And you are exactly what I want.”

#### TOM’S ACTING RESUME

PLAY	ROLE	THEATRE	DIRECTOR
The Student Prince	Dr. Engel	Western Samoa	Mrs. Barker
The Later Christopher Bean	Davenport	Church College of Hawaii	Prof. Richard Waite

Angel Street	Mr. Manningham	C.C.H.	Prof. Richard Waite
Time Remembered	Lord Hector	Brigham Young University	Dr. Preston
Gledhill Solid Gold Cadillac	Cliff Snell	Brigham Young University	Prof. Morris Clinger
The Lark	Inquisitor	Brigham Young University	Dr. Harold I. Hansen
Night Must Fall	Hubert	Brigham Young University	Dr. Harold I. Hansen
The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife	Adam	Brigham Young University	Dr. Max Golightly
Peter Pan	Smee	Scera Theatre, Orem, Utah	Buddy Youngreen
The Wizard of Oz	Tinman	Scera Theatre, Orem, Utah	Buddy Youngreen
As You Like It	Orlando	Utah State University	Prof. Floyd T. Morgan
The Merchant of Venice	Bassanio	Utah State University	Prof. Floyd T. Morgan
The Taming of the Shrew	Hortensio	Utah State University	Prof. Floyd T. Morgan
After Dark	Villain	Utah State University	Prof. Floyd T. Morgan
Blithe Spirit	Charles Condomine	U.S.U.	Prof. Floyd T. Morgan
The Imaginary Invalid	Pres. Med. Faculty	U.S.U.	Prof. Floyd T. Morgan
Pelleas & Mellisande	Pelleas	Utah State University	Prof. Vosco Call
Billy Budd	CPT. Vere	Utah State University	Prof. Vosco Call
Much Ado About Nothing	Benedict	Utah Shakespearean Festival	Fred Adams
The Merry Wives of Windsor	Ford	Utah Shakespearean Festival	Thomas Markus
King Lear	France	Utah Shakespearean Festival	Michael Addison
Madwoman of Chaillot	President	Southern Illinois University	Prof. Williams
Come Blow Your Horn	Mr. Baker	Theatre 138	Tom Carlin
Fiddler On The Roof	Rabbi	Skyline High School	Tom Stokoe
Camelot	Pellinore	Murray Arts Council	Doug Bishop
Oedipus The King	Kreon	University of Utah	Prof. Robert Hyde Wilson
Everyman (stage reading)	God	Stage Right Theatre Co.	David Bruner