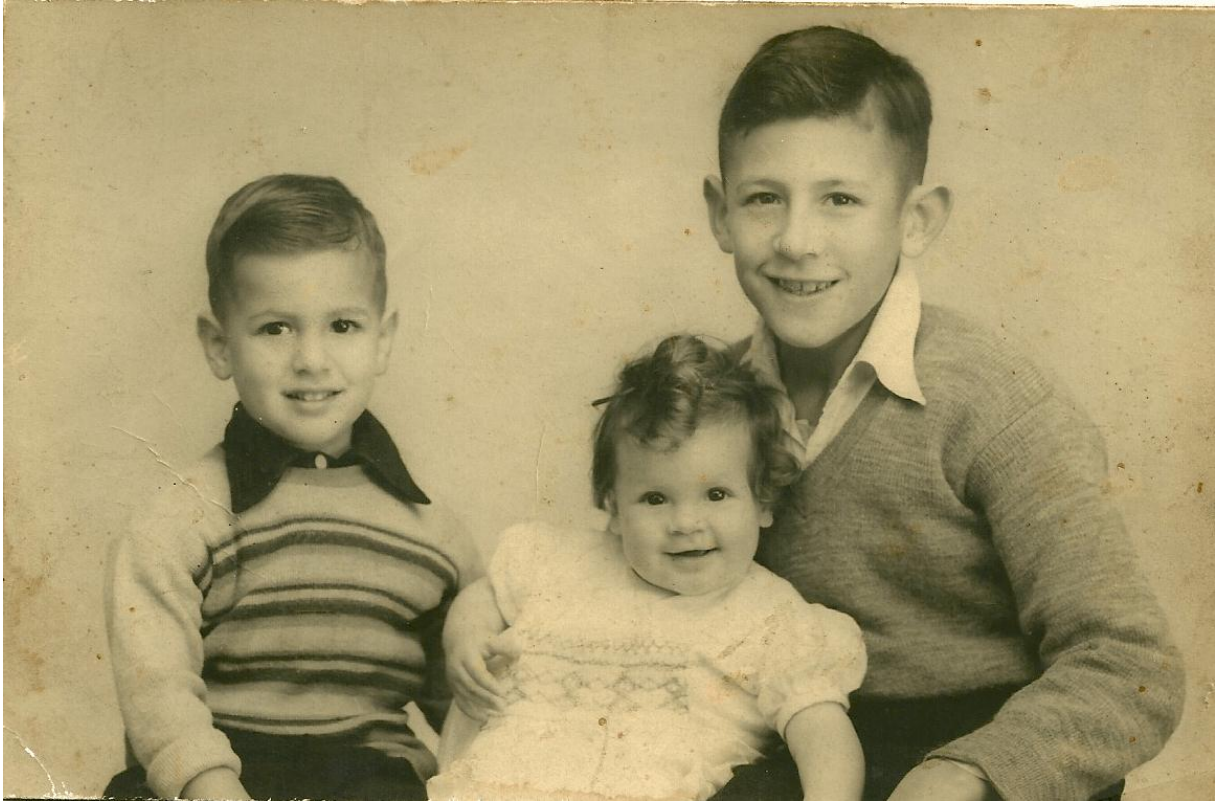


## Chapter 5

### Stokoes in Samoa, 1952 – 1961



*Leo, Lilian and Tommy in New Zealand before the move to Samoa*

**Leo:** My father sacrificed for me starting when I was a young child. I was ill as a baby and the climate of New Zealand was not suitable for my health. It was much too cold for me. I was continuously developing pneumonia after any cold or flu that I caught. At one point of my infancy I almost died after a bout with bronchitis.

Our family doctor advised my parents that a move to a warmer climate was necessary. My dad left behind a beautiful brick home that he and mom had built, a good job and many friends. . . just to make sure I would have the opportunity to grow up healthy and strong. We moved to Western Samoa where my parents became plantation owners on government leased land. They grew and exported bananas, cocoa, and copra. It was difficult and hard work. My father being a hauole or palagi had to adjust to this new way of life. My father even managed to learn enough Samoan to get by.

I remember how my father would always call me to eat first before anyone else just to make sure that I had the best portion of whatever was prepared. My mother questioned my father about this daily practice and he responded, Because Leo is the sickly one... the other two are

strong. Dad was always so concerned about my health and well-being.

**Bella:** After talking with Tom I packed up and took the kids to Western Samoa. When we got there I went and stayed with my Uncle Joe Crichton. Later on my sister Nora say to go up to her home on the plantation. So I went and stayed there until I fell out with her. She always tell me this, Why did you come here when you were poor? You don't have anything. I got real mad and slapped her face. There were more people on her side. So Nora, daughter Doreen and a cousin beat me up. Then Aiono Luki, Nora's husband, stopped the fight. I was bruised, my face was terrible. I was black and blue. One of my eyes was very bloodshot. Anyway, I decided I would go to the place where we could lease land from the government. I asked some Samoan boys to build a thatched house for me and my kids. I got corrugated iron and one drum from Aiono Luki and took it down to catch water. We lived there.

Tom went back to New Zealand and we stayed in Samoa. Just me and the kids out in the bush. Tommy went to school in Apia. Only me and the kids in the bush during the week. We farmed 45 acres there. We planted cacao, bananas, taro, bread fruit trees and coconut trees. All this in the plantation. The kids and I went to Samoa in April, 1952. Tom had to sell the house in Castlecliff. He came at the end of 1954.

### Thieves in Samoa

**Tom:** I rented a thirty-two acre coconut plantation from a man by the name of Jahnke for 350 pounds a year (about \$1,000.) There was an empty house on the plantation where I lived while working the property. When it was time to pick cocoa or dry copra I would stay for several days. Rats crawling up under my sleeping nets at night.

There were a lot of thieves there. I shot one who was in the act of stealing coconuts. Three judges heard the case when it came to trial. Two were Samoans and one was a palagi. They said I had been subjected to insult and provocation, but because the thief was standing on a public road when I shot him, the judge imposed a fine. They collected a small fine of which two thirds went to the Red Cross and one third went to the judges. It was not a great deal of money. I forget the amount now. But I won the case. If the thief hadn't been standing on a public road, I would not have had to pay anything.



This gang of thieves had been knocking the coconuts off the trees with stones at one o'clock on a hot day. So I picked up my 12 gage shot gun and then realized I had only one shot left. When you have only one shot you can't afford to miss. I saw them there and they saw me and started throwing stones. I aimed at the leader. I hit him in the leg at about 35 yards. Everyone took off. I peppered the leader with lead. The judges asked him to take off his shirt in court. He showed them all the marks from my lead. He was not badly hurt. That stopped that crowd from stealing from my trees. As far as the thieves were concerned, I was the enemy.

They had been robbing Jahnke's place for years. I came along and chased them off with a

gun. From then on they were afraid to go in and that meant they weren't making any money. One Niue islander said, Before that Palagi came I used to get one bag of copra every week and now he's there with a gun so I get nothing. He used to come out on moonlit nights and climb the trees to steal from me. He went out on a wet night and got pneumonia and three days later he died. Thank goodness, I said, that's one less thief.

They are a funny lot, those Niue islanders, you've got to watch out for them. They are quite capable of premeditated murder. The commissioner of the island was murdered by one of them. Samoans, usually, up to now at least, would not come around at night and murder you. They only get mad and start fights. A Samoan would never come at night and stick a spear into you but a Niue islander would. You have to look out for them. They are more like the New Zealand Maoris. They live on the most outlying of the Cook Islands, those located 360 miles south of Samoa.

The first time I went there, before World War 2, those people were very shy. They would stand behind trees and peep out at you. Some would come out and sell cards and little things like that. The only ship that ever went near them was the 750 ton Maui Pomare. When I went there, the man who was in charge of the island, an old army captain, showed us around. In that day, the people used to have a new king every year. They would select a man to be their king and then at the end of the year, they would kill him and select someone else. That was their custom. You could not get into a canoe and sail to Tonga or anywhere else for that matter. If you did and then tried to return you would be met with instant death.

When I went there in 1938 I was shown a pile of human bones. I was told that when a group of Tongans arrived and there was a pitch battle, skulls, leg bones and many other bones lay amongst the rocks on the beach. Ships used to stop and pick up copra and bananas. But they have an air strip there now. The natives are all L.M.S. (London Missionary Society.) They do not practice any other religion. The Mormons tried to proselyte there but only created trouble. Those islanders made up their mind as to what they were and that was the end of it. On the island of Tonga the people are nearly all Methodists.

When I left Samoa I gave the rifle to the police and I handed my shotgun over to John Sterling. He is married to Walter Jahnke's sister.

**Tommy:** Surely there is someone who runs that land now (in 1985).

**Tom:** From what I hear it is an absolute wilderness now. Fuesaiga everywhere, crawling all over the place. The land has been given to the Fasito'outa people. But nobody is doing anything with it and as far as I know; no one lives there.

When I went to Samoa in 1953, I subleased land from Henry Krone, land belonging to the Crown Estates. I signed an agreement written between the King of England in the lawyer's office. They kept the original there. I never got a copy. When they got self-government that was the end of everything. Self-government has done them no good. They are hopelessly in debt and have borrowed from everybody including the Russians. They borrowed from Russia for one project and after about twelve months someone in Moscow sent them a letter asking how the

project was coming along? Someone noticed that some of our former neighbors were building two story houses and buying new motor cars. That is what happened to the Russian money. A lot of other money was lost in the same way.

The big wooden building in the middle of Apia that contained all the government records caught fire and all the records and everything went up in flames. There is no record of who owns what there anymore. It all went up in smoke years ago. They don't know who owns the land now. They have people who come along now and say, I'm the Matai and the land is mine. There is no record of anything. It was all burned up in that fire. It was an old wooden building, bone dry and when it caught fire. It was gone in a few minutes. If land owners kept copies of their records they are all right but if not, they could be arguing in the courts for years.

Western Samoa joined the British Commonwealth after being independent for about fifteen years. I don't know why they let them in at all. I was there in 1961 when the change took place. It will never do any good. The whole government is run by crooks and they all take turns dipping their hands into the money. The same is true of American Samoa. The money just disappears.

The banks were having the same problem. The accountants were spending the bank's money. Everyone was running around and having a good time. People in the bank in Western Samoa were doing this as well. We knew the post office people were crooked but we thought our money would be safe in the bank. Money is not safe anywhere in that country. They have had crooked post masters, one after another. They just sit in that little room at night working overtime opening registered letters, stealing people's money and then resealing the envelopes.

One of the Mormon bishop's was the latest to be convicted. He was a post master in Western Samoa. He and three others were convicted of stealing. The Rivers family were kicked out of Western Samoa because they were stealing. They stole our money.

I sent 10 (430) pound notes, every week and you never got any of it. Every month I sent 10 pound notes by registered letter. . . . Thirty six ten pound notes never arrived. I'm mad about it to this day. I felt like shooting the man who stole it. All the time I was working long hours and sending money to the family and they never got it. It was stolen right out of the post office. I still feel it down here (pointing to heart.)

**Bella:** I didn't received that many letters with money. But dad says he sent them.

**Tommy:** Every letter had a 10 pound note in it?

**Tom,** The post master was working overtime in that room up above the post office opening letters, taking out the money and then sealing them back up again. It was not only my money; other people lost their money the same way.

When the authorities finally figured it out instead of putting him in jail or shooting him, they just fined him five hundred dollars for smuggling.

**Tommy:** That was postmaster Rivers?

**Bella,** Yes, they took the job away from him and he bought property and built a house there. This was near the time I left for Hawaii to be a dorm mother. They came to Hawaii and worked the same dorm job I had. They had to get out of Samoa because people knew they were thieves.

When they worked for the store in Apia it was the same thing. The store was short goods and money and the girls in the store knew about it. When they went to Hawaii to run a Motel they stole from the motel as well. News finally got around Hawaii that they were crooks and they had to leave and come to the mainland. Now they live here in Utah.



*Tom and Bella in Samoa at Grete's house in Savalalo, Apia*

When the Rivers' grandson came to Hawaii, we had to feed him. He was the son of their oldest boy who attended the Church College of Hawaii. Most of the time he had no money to eat. He would come to our house. I would feed him and wash his clothes. When I went to Apia in the summer of 1974, his grandmother gave us some nice gifts and a big dinner because we were so good to her grandson. (June 23, 1985 Interview)

**Bella:** We all got up early in the morning and went to work. People in that part of the world eat only two meals a day. Usually they ate no breakfast. They ate about 2:00 p.m. and again about sunset. The Samoans love food and were always hungry. The white man has his money, the Samoan has his food, as the saying goes.

Grandpa said he got used to living in Samoa. He was the only white man in the area. There were only about fifty white men in the whole country. They did not want white men there. Grandpa got along well with his Samoan neighbors. The Samoans are very cranky people. They fight a lot

*Classmates Mataio Fiamalua, the headmaster's daughter, Tele Frost, Toia Fiti, and Tommy Stokoe at Samoa College, 1957.*



among themselves. We had a couple of gangs (laborers) working for us. There was a dog fight in the village. The two gangs began to fight and we lost half our gang of workers. They all went to the fight and quit working. Some stayed in the village. Some returned to work. The dog fight started the whole thing off.

**Tommy:** In Samoa dad enjoyed socializing with friends, relatives and neighbors. He liked visiting the R.S.A. club (Returned Soldiers Association,) to drink beer and socialize, shooting pigeons and flying foxes, and occasional trips to Apia. He enjoyed the annual trip to Lefaga beach to Ka Pololo with the Jahnke and Thieme families where we caught the little sea creatures that appeared annually close to shore. And dad enjoyed picking lemons and oranges from Niutapua's place down the road from our plantation at Peleligi.

One of the most interesting conversations I ever heard dad engage in was with two Chinamen all of them foreigners trying to communicate in Samoan. Ah Hangi and Ah Pingi were our neighbors. Apparently they had similar experiences with dad. They would send boys into the plantation to plant bananas and after a while they would sit around doing nothing. So they were complaining to each other about the boys. You have to understand Samoan to appreciate this conversation. Ah Hangi said Pau lea tasi tama Samoa tele paie nofo nofo muli! And Dad replied Oe, e mogi lava. Tele paie tama Samoa, nofo nofo muli! And Ah Pingi said, Nofo so'o! Tautau ini muli, alu faigaluega! And Ha Hangi said Leai ini! Kiki! Kiki muli And Dad would say E mogi lava, Kiki muli! Basically, the conversation was complaining about Samoan workers and how some are lazy and should get their butts kicked.

Dad was an avid reader and had excellent knowledge of history, political science and geography. He enjoyed current events, reading the news, and keeping abreast with what was happening around the world. He was a man who sought after knowledge, had excellent penmanship and enjoyed academic discussions.

## **Samoa College & Classes at the Church College**

From 1954 - 1958 I attended Samoa College located in Vaivase just outside of Apia. The high school classes were designated as Form 3, Form 4, Lower 5<sup>th</sup>, and Upper 5<sup>th</sup>. The education system of Samoa College was based upon the New Zealand education system with teachers mainly from New Zealand, two from the United States, and a few Samoan teachers who taught Form 1 and Form 2.

The curriculum included English, geography, world history, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, chemistry, physics, biology, and woodwork for the boys. Another segment of the education program was termed Commercial. This included typing, book keeping, accounting, and other related subjects that I never took as I was not in the Commercial program. The Upper 5<sup>th</sup> year culminated in the taking of a standardized test covering seven subjects. The test was created in New Zealand and sent to Samoa. Our Upper 5<sup>th</sup> class took it at a classroom in a protestant church and was administered by the Pastor of the church. The tests were sent to New Zealand where they were graded and the results were sent to Samoa. Those who passed their names were announced over radio, Station 2AP in Apia.

The test was known as the School Certificate exam and in order to achieve the School Certificate or graduation diploma, students had to pass all seven classes by scoring a minimum of 60/100 on each of the seven tests. If one failed one class, even by 2 points, that student had to repeat the entire school year and all seven classes. I got 58/100 in algebra. Even though I passed the remaining 6 classes, that 2 point deficiency caused me to repeat my senior year of high school and all seven classes again.

So, at the end of the 1958 school year I took the school certificate examination for the second time. The test was changed for each of the seven classes. Extraordinarily, I repeated 58/100 again except this time it was in trigonometry. I passed the other six classes with flying colors. Thus I had failed to graduate from high school for the second year in a row. For lack of better company, I might add that the principal's daughter also flunked. For all purposes, my education had come to an end and planting and harvesting bananas was to be my fate for the rest of my life.

But the Lord moves in mysterious ways. Up until 1958 there was no church of any denomination in Lepale where we lived on our plantation. Hence, we never went to church. In 1958 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints sent missionaries to preach the gospel to those living on plantations in Lepale, Fasito'outa and a branch was established. Our family began to attend.

One Sunday, a lady missionary by the name of Sister Shimoda from Hawaii, asked me what were my plans upon completing high school. I said, "Just stay at home and work on the plantation". She then surprised me by saying, "How would you like to attend college in America?" I never dreamed of going to the United States of America let alone going to school there. I said, "Yes". She said she would do some investigating and get to back to me.



*Mum Stokoe, Leo & Lilian on horse, with Sala, Tommy, Saina and Keiki*

She talked to Brother Barker, principal of the Mormon school known as the Church College of Western Samoa which operated upon the American system of education. She arranged a meeting with him. Brother Barker indicated to get into the Church College of Hawaii a transcript of classes was necessary showing letter grades. As letter grades did not exist in the New Zealand system at Samoa College, I should attend the Church College of Western Samoa in 1959 where letter grades were earned per subject. My transcript of such could then be submitted for entrance consideration to the Church College of Hawaii. It all panned out and by August, 1959 I was admitted to the Church College of Hawaii and would attend on a student visa. Also, the College would give each of us from Samoa a grant-in-aid to help with our tuition. So it was the gospel of Jesus Christ and a dedicated missionary that enabled my coming to America and getting a college education leading to a teaching career of 42 years.

When it was time for me to leave Samoa for Hawaii, I had no plane fare. Mum had always been kind to the Samoans who asked for bananas and taros to feed their families. They were poor. She would say, Go ahead, load up the sacks on your horses. Take what you need. She would give it to them free. She even gave them money. Prior to the date of my scheduled departure to Hawaii, mum had a farewell party for me and invited relatives and friends included the people she had been kind to and had given bananas, taros, and even money. These people brought money as gifts to me. When all was added up I had my plane fare to Hawaii.

### **Leaving Samoa**

**TOM:** All kinds of funny things happened in Samoa. Bella was driving through Apia with a gang on a truck. They got chased by the police. A few miles out of Apia the police caught up with them and took eight of the workers away. They arrested them for stealing someone's pigs.



We only had a pig or two on our plantation. Practically know one kept cows because people in Samoa don't drink milk. Everyone eats baked or boiled green bananas and taro. There is not much meat there. Some of Bella's relatives had a few cows. The economy of Samoa is based on farming and fishing. There wasn't any other industry.



A movie company filming Return to Paradise brought in these funny looking bananas from Queensland, Australia some 2,500 miles away. They thought they looked artistic so they put the plants in a big car and brought them in. Gary Cooper and his gang were shooting the film. These bananas had the Bunchie disease. We were doing fine on our banana plantation until that happened.

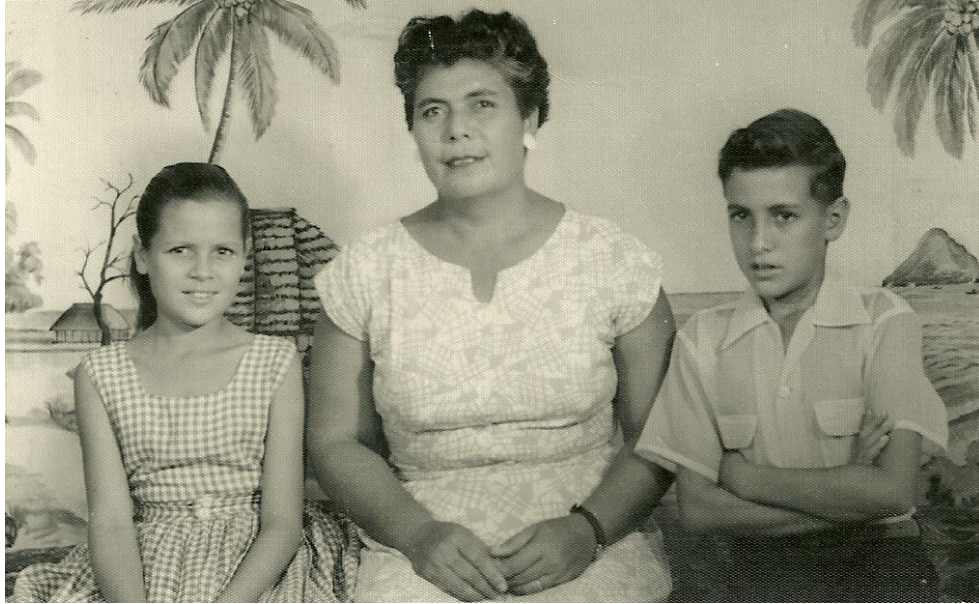
In no time diseased spores had spread. The filming crew was working right alongside the wharf shed where the bananas were being packed for shipping when they came in. The Bunchie disease spores spread all over the island and wiped out half the banana crops there.

**Bella:** When I saw there was hardly any money coming in and that we were not shipping many bananas because of the bunchy top disease, I fast and I pray and ask Heavenly Father what can I do? The children need an education. I did not want my family to sink into the ground and die in poverty. I was very sad. I say, Father in Heaven, can you help us? Can you make something happen so my kids can get an education?

I rode a horse down to the coast to catch a bus and go to Apia. When I returned from Apia, I got on my horse and traveled up toward where Tom was working at the rented coconut plantation. I stayed there for a while until it began to get dark. Then I got on my horse and headed up the road toward our own banana plantation. That is where I lived caring for our bananas. It was a moonlit night. About fifteen minutes before I got home, I heard this voice whisper in my ear. bella, do you want to go to Hawaii? I said, yes, I like to go to Hawaii, but what for? And the voice keep on saying the same thing over and over until I got home.

Not too long after that, a man brought a letter to me from Brother and Sister Barker. Brother Barker was the principal of the church school in Pesega. I was asked to come meet President Richard Wootton, the President of the Church College of Hawaii in Laie. Tommy was already attending school there. So Tom and I went to meet him. We talked about Tommy. He said not to worry about him. He was an outstanding student. We felt good about that. Then he said to us. how would you like to come and be the dorm parents at the school?

This was an interesting offer. But the thing is, it would be hard because my husband was not a member of the church. Tom did not like the idea of going because he wasn't a Mormon. So sister Barker say, ask your husband again if he really wants you to come and work for the college. So I did. Tom said, alright, yes, you can go to Hawaii and take the kids and be a dorm mother. I will stay and work the plantation



That is what happened. I think President Wootton was inspired to offer me the job. This is the reason. After I got the job I stayed at the college for a while. President Wootton was leaving to go back to the mainland. Someone else would be president. So Lilian and Leo and I prepared some leis and went over to say Good Bye and present our leis.

I say, President Wootton, we came to say 'Good bye. We like to thank you for the job. Now it is possible for me to send my children to school. If you didn't give me the job my children could not get an education. So we thank you very much.' He said, 'Sister Stokoe, I received a revelation. That is why I gave you the job.' I say, 'I received a revelation too.' We did not tell each other what our revelations were. I work for eighteen years for the college and I retired from there. No other dorm mother worked that long. Many came and worked for three or four years and then left. I am there for eighteen years.

When I was offered the job in Hawaii, I told Sister Barker that I had very little money. She said, Let's write a letter to President Wootton and have him pay your fare. Sister Barker wrote the letter. I signed and we mailed it. Then we got the answer that the school was going to send money to pay my fare. But the question was, What about my children? So I said to sister Barker, return the money, I am not coming because I do not have the money to pay for my children. She said, Get ready, I will pay their fares and you can pay me back later.

We were happy. I prayed hard about the money for the fares. The spirit of the Lord was w  
A man by the name of Fa'atamala Tuia, the speaker of the House at Tutuila at that time, had influence with the Immigration Department. So one of the elders said to me, Sister Stokoe, Fa'atamala is at the mission home. You should go and see him. I went in a taxi but he was not there. So I gave the message to Brother Hanks, the mission president. He said, I will speak to Fa'atamala and he will help you. I stayed in Vaiala with my sister Nora. Brother and Sister Baker gave us money so that we could come to Hawaii.

The message finally came for me to get ready. I was told to go to American Samoa. That Fa'atamala would arrange everything. I was told what day to come. So I paid all my bills and prepared my passport with the children. We caught the flight from Faleolo airport in Western Samoa to Pago Pago in American Samoa where two elders met the children and I with a car.

They had prepared a house for us and we stayed until everything was arranged. Fa'atamala said he would speak to Immigration and arrange everything for us. The man said I had to have a letter or telegram saying President Wootten had a job for me. So we got a wire from President Wootten that said I had a job. When we went to Immigration the officer said that I would have to pay double fare so I could get back in case something happened. I did not have money to pay double fare. Fa'atamala said, Send Bella and the children, I will sign as her sponsor. So we did not have to pay double fare.

You see, the Lord made it possible for us to go. When we got to the airport in Hawaii, my cousin Elisa Uale and her family were there waiting for us. Tommy had just left for the mainland. He knew we were coming but he had gone on to attend BYU. While he was living with Uncle Amilale and Aunt Elisa in Laie, his uncle, also the bishop of Laie 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward, gave him a blessing. He told Tommy he would become a light unto the youth. (Tommy taught high school and junior high for over four decades retiring in 2010.)

When we arrived we stayed overnight with my cousin Elisa Uale and husband Amilale. The next day was Christmas, 1961. That evening, Brother Olsen, who was Dean of Students at the College, came with his car and picked us up. He took us to the College where I began my career as a dorm mother as pictured below.



Lilian, Bella, Leo