

## Water is Life in Samoa

Anxiously waiting for our umu to cook in the fire pit, I patiently listened to my grandfather tell the story of how our people of Samoa lived dependently on the beautiful Pacific Ocean, which surrounded our little island, for their survival. The clean and bountiful water bordering Samoa provided our way of life; fishing for multiple gem colored fish of all sizes within the clear turquoise infused ocean. Succulent giant sea turtles wandered aimlessly on the soft sands of our Pago Pago harbor, searching for a quiet place to rest before heading out to sea again. Crunchy sea cucumbers and spiny sea urchins were carefully plucked off the nearby coral reef, strategically opened and eaten fresh out of the water. These and many other ocean delicacies were the main staples that our people fed upon daily and sold in the markets, from our healthy and abundant ocean.

Frequent tropical rain water flooded the tops of our mountains, providing enough water to supply us with fresh drinking water and created pools for all the children to play and swim in. The torrential rain sent water streaming down the mountainside and we excitedly slid on large banana leaves from the swollen streams, down the mountain laughing and singing; with a few bumps and bruises but well worth the fun.

In 1954, on the pristine harbor of our Pago Pago, American Samoan Island, a cannery opened its doors. The provided employment by the cannery was a miracle for our people; we never knew what it was like to have a large and modern factory on our small, untainted island.

Rejoicing for the new cannery and the jobs it provided, our people could not foresee what disaster lie ahead of them.

Almost 50 years later, the cannery business along with its fishing nets and rusted ocean boats had polluted our healthy and life giving waters. Our ocean waters and beaches now reflect the years of abuse by modern machinery and modern man. Visualize the image in your head, grimy oil deposits floating on the surface of the harbor ocean, beaches with giant oil footprints scattered along the gray colored sands. Suddenly, fish and coral reef populations decreased due to the pollutants in the ocean. Samoans avoided eating or fishing from the Pago Pago harbor due to the heavy metallic content in the fish and the pollutants in the water. The mighty sea turtles that gracefully swam amongst our shores are gone and listed as an endangered species. Modern machinery and modern man, was not worth the price of our healthy ocean.

Since the closure of the cannery in 2010, our oceans have been at rest. The recovery if any is still unsure at this time. The ocean is still polluted, the fish are inedible, and our beaches are stained with the evidence of abuse and neglect. We must learn to nurture and conserve our natural water resources. Respect it, don't abuse or neglect it or it will disappear.