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King Tui Tupou's Birthday Celebration

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King Tui Tupou's Birthday Celebration

Holiday Customs

Informant:

Sharron Wallace was born in Logan Utah. She is athletic, loud, funny, and holds a strong importance on her family's cultural traditions. She currently is a student at the University of Arizona and plays for their volleyball team. She visits her family often, as she places great importance on a strong bond and connection between her and her immediate and extended family members.

Context:

I met Sharron in high school when we were in the same gym class. We've had this ongoing joke about how we're both called last when taking roll call—it's always been Wallace and then Ward. I chose to interview Sharon, as I have been fascinated with her family's many cultural traditions. When I met Sharron and her family there was a sense of unity and power. They displayed extreme importance to their culture and religion. We spoke at her home in North Logan, Utah during the Thanksgiving break as she had come home from college to celebrate with her family.

Text:

Well, the Tongan Islands also known as the Friendly Island of Tonga is the last remaining monarchy in the South Pacific. There are a lot of rich and deep-rooted traditions of this little island. Alongside Polynesian and Tongan islands, religion is deeply rooted. All of the schools are religiously ran using their beliefs of god [and...uh...] as a core foundation. The different religions are LDS, Catholic, [um...] Methodist, and many others. Most of the teachings are similar to the syllabus [gestures air quotes with hands] used in Great Britain, however, by law there is a portion of each day that is designated for teachers, who we call punake. Their responsibility is to teach the students Tau'olunga which is a Polynesian traditional dance that is [uh...] passed on traditions that were carried on by each student's ancestors. Each school teaches their students the same songs that we in the states call church or hymn songs, as I'm sure you already knew. The Tau'olunga in combination of the various songs are used in the largest celebration of the year which is the first King, Tui Tupou's birthday. It is essentially a week-long celebration that the entire island uses to showcase what the students have learned throughout the year [nods head in

reassurance]. Recently, it has turned into more of a competition among schools and specifically among the students. During this time there are all sorts of food that we prepare. Lupulu is a meat and onion dish that is marinated in coconut milk and then baked into taro leaves. Ufi, is another type of food we eat during this celebration. Ufi is basically a large, white yam. Ota, which is my family's favorite dish is a dish composed of raw fish that is marinated in lemon juice. It's so good. Once my family moved to the states our relatives began to move her as well. This allows us to have our own version of this celebration all together. Because the children aren't taught Tau'olunga and the songs in U.S schools, it is the job of the parents to teach them. Once the parents feel their child is well prepared we compete [gestures air quotes with her hands] against our family members. [brief pause] As you can imagine, the competition among cousins and siblings is insanely funny to watch but also something that each of us take very...very... seriously.

Texture:

When discussing the relevance of King Tui Tupou's birthday with Sharron her whole family was home during our interview. This added to the realness and the family's sense of unity surrounding this celebration. While Sharron talked, she was serious, loving, and informative. She held her little baby brother during our conversation and you could tell that her and her family were getting excited to start teaching him Tau'olunga as well as the songs. After on interview, while driving home, I felt a sense of empowerment and unity consume me. Later, I realized that my emotions were because of the love and passion Sharron had while describing the significance of this celebration to her and her family.

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