

The Catholic COURIER

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE ROCHESTER, DIOCESE

Journal

Vol. 79 No. 12

PAGE 1B

Friday, December 22, 1967

The Smetts

Rochester's Dynamic Duo Relates Samoan Story

By MONICA REEVES

With the sad tale of Sadie Thompson (of Somerset Maugham's "Rain") in mind and the admonitions of friends and family ringing in their ears ("Be careful now—I understand they have poisonous snakes crawling all over. And you know the last American couple that went there never made it back.") Mr. and Mrs. Robert Smett left for American Samoa three months ago. Their purpose was to teach in a mission school.

Bob Smett, former News Editor of the Catholic Courier-Journal and his wife Joan have yet to come across any lethal reptiles and the Samoans have proved to be a warm and hospitable people.

But life in the South Seas is a considerable departure from that Stateside. In Samoa, life goes swiftly—at a slow pace. And, it's a pace that a product of the American rat race must learn to adjust to. Even before the Smetts left they were warned of this. The Samoans are predictable only in one thing—their unpredictability. They'll invariably react in a manner opposite from that which you'd guess they would.

the islanders have become faithful followers of the saga of the American West. They love the cowboy names, too. One day Bob discovered that he was teaching a youngster, Duke, who had a brother Maverick. Cheyenne and that the youngsters' mother was expecting a Bonanza! At the local hospital there's a lab technician with three children: CO2, Oxygen and Hydrogen.

A Sheer Delight

The Smetts report that Samoan children are a sheer delight—if you appreciate smiles, good temper and obedience. They are living evidence that insistence on obedience does not restrain personality development, American child psychologists notwithstanding. No parent ever has to repeat a command to a child; it is obeyed without hesitation or comment.

Not that Samoan children are angels—far from it. They get into as much mischief as any other children, maybe even more because they are left on their own so much of the time. Despite their obedience, Bob has found his students are more exuberant than their counterparts in other countries. He attributes this to the lovely,

peaceful environment in which they are raised. He says "they are the happy savages."

The social life on American Samoa is also different than that Stateside, although one familiar Stateside tradition—the cocktail party—has made its way to the South Sea isle, too.

The Smetts first real initiation into the social whirl on Samoa was the "uma" dinner. The uma is a pit dug behind the house with a little shed-like structure over it. The fire is lighted in the uma late in the afternoon and the food (wrapped in banana leaves) is piled in the umas and then covered with more wet leaves. The food is about half "palagi" (white man's) food and half native Samoan: roast pork, pea-soup (our corned beef), small pigeon (like squab), bonita (tuna steaks), crab, tossed salad, and taro. Samoa's answer to the potato. (The Smetts report that taro tastes like nothing and looks worse.)

Debutantes' Ball

The Samoan social season was climaxed by the Debutantes' Ball in late October. It was at this time that 21 girls were presented to the Bishop of the island. Girls being girls the world over, they were of course particularly interested in their outfits for the occasion—long white formals. And another Stateside practice, that of fundraising, was involved too. Proceeds from the affair went to purchase new television sets for the schools.

The Smetts recently moved into a home of their own (with four walls no less). The move meant they wouldn't have to run next door for showers anymore. They have once again a huge picture window—11 feet long, but without the benefit of glass in it. After a few steady downpours they had to rig up a sheet of canvas and some clothesline to keep the elements outside where they belong.

But however different life may be in Samoa, the Smetts report that the traffic situation is about the same as it is anywhere—with careless drivers and pedestrians walking in front of their Japanese-made car, Toyota. There is one additional hazard—black bulls have an annoying habit of straying in front of one's car.



Joan Smett proudly stands before her new home on American Samoa.

In For Surprises

The Smetts, for all their research on island ways before their September departure, were still in for many surprises. They were greeted at the airport in Pago Pago by Father Richard Morin, a Marist missionary who has been in Samoa for the last three years. The airport itself was quite a departure from the modern one which they left behind a few days before in Rochester. Even the main building was an example of Samoan architecture: it was covered by a thatched roof and had no sides.

The couple made their first home with Philip Nokura, a Samoan-Japanese who is a "matia" or chief. The house was on the side of a hill with one 18 by 12 foot room and no running water. But a view of the inactive volcano—the Rainmaker—framed by their picture window made up for any lack of modern convenience.

The foliage around the house was, thanks to the great amount of rainfall common to the island, understandably lush. From their window they could see cocoa and breadfruit trees, which the Samoan children, as inquisitive as children anywhere climbed, to peer in at their strange, new neighbors at siesta time (a great Samoan custom the Smetts think Americans would do well to imitate).

The Smetts soon discovered that nature had provided them with a handy alarm clock—a Japanese rooster perched in a cocoa tree three feet from their window—who went off promptly at 4 a.m. every morning, setting off every rooster on the island.

Island Education

The educational system in Samoa is a far cry from that of Rochester. Bob teaches English to 7th and 8th grade youngsters at the Marist Brothers' school—half a mile from their home in Utulei. The building itself is dilapidated but the warm welcome of the faculty, composed of five brothers and four Samoan teachers more than make up for it. In addition to this, he has taken on the additional task of teaching catechism to the youngest boys.

Joan teaches all subjects of the brand new Sisters school at the fifth grade level.

The roster of names reads like alphabet soup gone wild—Lemalfe (Raphael), Maluwe (in translation: Very Jittery).

With the coming of television,

New SVD Head Once Served Here

Father John Paul Musinsky, S.V.D., onetime novice master at the Divine Word Seminary,



FATHER MUSINSKY
New SVD Head

Conesus, has been elected superior general of his order. He is the first American to hold the office.

Father Musinsky, 48, was at Conesus during 1961-64. He had recently been spiritual director at the Epworth, Ia., seminary.

Father Musinsky was born in Farrell, Pa. He was ordained at the Divine Word seminary in Techny, Ill., in 1944, did post-graduate work at Gregorian University in Rome, then taught for his order in Germany. For 12 years he was dean of theologians at Techny, the society's American headquarters.

As superior general, he automatically becomes chairman of the Extraordinary General Chapter now meeting in Nemi, near Rome, to revise the society's constitutions. He succeeds Father John Schuette, a native of Munster, Germany.

The retiring superior general, a co-author of the Vatican II Decree on the Missions, recently explained the purpose of the continuing chapter meeting. In a Vatican Radio interview, he said:

"We are attempting to clarify the meaning of our religious vows, especially the vow of pov-

erty; and how to harmonize the religious and missionary aspects of our vocations. We have reviewed some administrative problems and our whole formation program, particularly the minor seminary.

"In some parts of the world our minor seminary program seems to be in crisis and perhaps cannot be maintained in its present form; in other countries it is flourishing. In all probability this, like so many other problems, will have to be solved on a territorial basis. A territorial approach could possibly lead to a certain amount of decentralization in the Society."

Concerning the position of Religious Brothers who form one third of the organization Father Schuette said, "In all that does not concern the priestly ordination and jurisdiction, differences between brothers and clerics will disappear."

Rome Site For Ordination

Douglas C. Hoffman, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Hoffman, West Webster, was ordained to



DOUGLAS C. HOFFMAN

the priesthood Dec. 21 at St. Peter's in Rome.

A graduate of St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's, Father Hoffman was appointed in 1964 by Bishop Kearney to study at the North American College in Rome.

Father Hoffman's parents and two brothers, and Father Richard O'Connell, St. Agnes Church, Avon and Father Francis Klehammer, St. Rita's Church, West Webster along with numerous other relatives and friends went to Rome for the ordination.



Bob Smett points out the lush foliage which is typical of Samoa.



The Marist Brothers' School where Bob Smett teaches. Note boys on the left-hand side of the picture pledging allegiance to the flag—a morning ritual at the school.

peace on earth

what better wish for Christmas '67?

the National

DOWNTOWN • SOUTHTOWN • PITTSFORD • GREECE