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Micronesians Abroad

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The Extent of Emigration

Today there are over 30,000 FSM citizens and 20,000 Marshallese living in the United States and its territories. Add to that possibly another 10,000 Palauans, and you have a total of 60,000 Micronesians living away from home. These are not students, young people away for a short time, or islanders who are doing a brief stint with the military. These are people–young and old, fluent English-speakers and those who know no more than a few words of the language–who have chosen to take up residence abroad.

Emigration is not an entirely new phenomenon. Palauans have been leaving home since the late 1940s. Already in 1953, there were a hundred Palauans on Guam with their own Palau Association. As their numbers grew in subsequent years, they would meet in a Palauan *bai* and worship in a local language Protestant church. From the early 1970s, as hundreds of Micronesian students began heading for college in the US, thanks to the extension of the Pell Grant, emigration from Palau stepped up to about 250 a year. These were not young men and women on their way to college for a few years before returning home; they were people with a one-way ticket out. By the late 1970s, individuals from other parts of Micronesia as well were dribbling into Guam and the US with the intention of staying. The 1980 US Census recorded several hundred people from what was then coming to be known as FSM, most of them Outer Island Yapese, living in the US. These mostly educated, young people were loathe to return to their atolls where there was no wage employment, but reluctant to settle in Yap where they lacked status and land.

Then, in 1986 with the formal implementation of the Compact of Free Association in FSM and the Republic of the Marshalls, Micronesians were granted the right to live and work in the US for an unlimited period. The ensuing emigration was limited at first: the emigration from FSM was only about one percent a year, half of what it is today, and the early migrants were heavily Chuukese. The main destinations in those early years were Guam and Saipan. As both places suffered from a recession in the early 1990s and new jobs became scarce, more and more Micronesians headed for

Assuming the reliability of the data on our survey, total yearly remittances from the 30,000 FSM emigrants to their home islands would come to $17.6 million. At first, we thought this might be inflated because of the tendency of migrants to exaggerate the amounts they send back home. To check this figure, then, we inquired of wire transfer services and banks their own estimates of the total remittances based on their share of the market. Although they were reluctant to share actual figures, the institutions that responded estimated the total value of yearly transfers from US to FSM to be at least $20 million. On the basis of such information, we can confidently assume that remittances lie between $15 million and $20 million a year.

These remittances, then, would represent about 8 percent of the total goods and services in the FSM economy, and this figure could be expected to grow as the number of emigrants continues to rise. This is a far cry from the 25 percent of Samoa's GDP or the 45 percent of Tonga's that remittances represent, but it's a start. It suggests that the migrants, even from afar, have a vital role to play in FSM's economy in the future. It indicates that not only have the Micronesians abroad done well for themselves, but they are doing well by their country.

dependant–whether unemployed because of age, health or ability level–has one wage-earner to support him.

The wages of these emigrants, naturally, tend to be low, with the range falling between $1,000 and $3,000 monthly–or roughly between $6 and $20 an hour. A few individuals could be earning as much as $4,000 monthly or even more, but they seem to be the rare exception. The survey suggests that there is no discernable correlation between the length of stay in the US and the salary earned. In fact, many Micronesians who have been living in the US for ten or twenty years are still earning about $2,000 a month, something in the area of $10-$12 hourly. Our impression is that once migrants have laid down stakes, brought their family to join them, and become part of a community, they are reluctant to move on even in the hope of find a more attractive and better paying job.

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Not a single person interviewed admitted receiving any money from the islands. There is no reason to doubt that any monetary assistance received by the migrants from folks back home was minimal. This should help lay to rest the old belief that the money flow runs from the islands outward to the US. If this was the case a few years ago when many families were getting started overseas, it is certainly no longer true today. The money flow, beyond all doubt, runs from overseas to the islands back home.

How large is the remittance flow? The 51 households in our informal survey reported a total of $88,800 in cash and another $37,100 in goods, or an average household contribution of just under $2,500 in remittances. The median yearly income per household, as indicated in the survey, was about $40,000. (If this figure seems high, remember that the average Micronesian household in the US has two of its members working.) If the results of the survey are credible, then, a household will send a little more than 6 percent of its total income back to home in some form or fashion.

Hawaii. The migrant outflow increased sharply in the mid-1990s as the effects of the stepdown in Compact funding for FSM and RMI were felt and as the government reforms, initiated by Asian Development Bank, lopped jobs from the public sector.

Today we are witnessing an emigration comparable to those that other Pacific islands–Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands and Guam–have been experiencing for years. A decade or two ago, writers took delight in pointing out that the emigration population of, say, Samoans in California was half the size of its resident population, or that the Guamanians on the West Coast outnumbered those on their home island. Now Micronesia is rapidly moving in the same direction. With 2,000 FSM citizens, 1,000 Marshallese, and a couple hundred Palauans leaving home each year to live abroad, one out of every four Micronesians is now living in the US or its territories. If migration continues at this same pace, we can expect that the number of emigrants will be about half the size of the resident population just ten years from now.

Is Emigration a Problem?

The size of the migrant community gives rise to concerns in some circles. For some the very fact that so many islanders have left home to seek work in the US is evidence of the failure of the island nations of Micronesia to build an economy capable of providing for their own future. Yet, the provision of the Compact of Free Association allowing islanders to immigrate freely into the US and work there without restriction was written into the Compact for just this purpose. It was intended as a fallback in the event that the local economies could not support their growing populations in years to come. The historical precedents of nations unable to support their own populations are numerous; they range from some of the large European nations–Ireland, Germany, Poland and Italy in the 19th century, to many of the countries of Asia

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and Latin America today. Moreover, every major island in the Pacific except the independent nations of Melanesia has had recourse to this strategy–and the only reason the Melanesian countries haven't is because there are no modernized nations that currently accept them.

Micronesians everywhere, when asked why they have chosen to move abroad, reply that they are looking for jobs–jobs that they can not find at home. There are other reasons as well: better education, health care for sick members of their family, and sometimes simply the desire to improve their lives. This should sound familiar to many of us who now call ourselves Americans. None of it is much different from what our grandparents or great-grandparents would have told immigration officials at Ellis Island a few generations ago.

Emigration is seldom trouble-free. The problems related to Micronesian emigration to Guam and Hawaii have been well publicized in recent years. Newspaper articles draw attention to the overcrowded and poorly maintained apartments, the emergence of shanty towns, people living in shipping containers or sleeping in parks. Then, too, there are the news items on the arrests for DUI, sexual molestation and domestic violence. With depressing regularity we find familiar island names in the Guam police blotter published in Pacific Daily News. We hear complaints from public school teachers that Micronesian children don't seem to be able to perform up to standard and require extra attention. The lists of medical indigents grows by the month. These new arrivals are not only troublesome but costly, it would seem. Guam and Hawaii have repeatedly filed claims to the federal government for Compact Impact funds in compensation for the burden that these immigrants have placed on their social services.

To judge by the news reports from Guam and Hawaii, the story of Micronesian migration is an unremittingly miserable tale of people unable or unwilling to make the necessary adjustment to life in a modern society. The assumption, of course, is that the islander population, as it moves further afield, will inflict much the same distress on communities in the mainland US. In an effort to find out what has happened to Micronesian emigrants in the US, a team from MicSem visited a number of communities with large

individuals in the network. Individuals who wished to slip off and go their own way could certainly do so, but at their own risk. The networks were an undeniably positive force in the communities we visited.

Education was a very high priority for nearly all the people we met. Indeed, many had moved to the US in the first place, they told us, not just to obtain employment but to secure a quality education for their children. As with immigrants in the past, the educational attainments of the younger generation will soon outdistance those of their elders. Repeatedly we heard of sons and daughters receiving advanced training as lawyers, doctors, pharmacists and accounts.

Older Micronesian immigrants are desperately trying to keep alive in their American-reared children the flame of cultural identity, but against strong odds. They attempt to do this in a number of ways–by speaking their language to their children, by offering their children island food when they can obtain it, by providing opportunities for the younger generation to associate with others from their own island. The wall hangings in their apartments–island carvings, lavalavas, even posters of contemporary island bands–attest to their sincerity. Understandably, however, the young people have mixed feelings about all this, confused notions regarding their own identity, and perhaps divided loyalties–toward their parents, on the one hand, with their cultural imperatives and old-fashioned customs, and toward the country in which they have prospered, on the other hand, with the enticing values and the limitless opportunities it seems to offer.

The Balance Sheet on Migration

As we moved from place to place, we handed out to some of the people we met a questionnaire that might help us gauge some of the economic characteristics of the migrant community abroad. A total of 51 households, containing 214 persons, from Hawaii and mainland US were represented in the survey.

Just over half of the members of all households were employed. This indicates that the ratio of the economically active to those who are not is relatively high at about 1:1. In other words, each

In Summary

The two-month trip that we made was never meant to be a sociological study. At best, we came away with a sampling of the varied Micronesian households that make up the immigrant communities in the US, Guam and the Northern Marianas. We returned with a good idea of the various kinds of work that these people do to support themselves and their families, and a sense of how these people are faring. More importantly, we came away with a feel for the challenges these people face in their new homes, an understanding of the strategies they depend on for survival, and an admiration for their persistent efforts to make it all work.

The challenges they face are, of course, similar to those other immigrants from other lands have faced before them. Our Micronesian people are, by and large, adjusting successfully and meeting these challenges well. Most have found steady jobs, although by no means the most desirable ones, and there is little to suggest that they are flitting from one position to another. There are any number of instances of a person taking an entry-level position and moving up to a managerial position in the same place after a few years. Although a few of the people we met are receiving social service assistance, we did not find people scheming to be put on the welfare rolls. In fact, most found such assistance distasteful and boasted of their ability to make it on their own without resorting to such aid.

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Everywhere we went, we found that Micronesian immigrants were quick to establish networks that bound families together. These networks were often church-based, usually Protestant rather than Catholic, that offered opportunities for common worship, sports and recreation, and strengthening of their sense of cultural identity. The networks served as a means of support for island families even as they afforded a measure of social control over the behavior of

populations to see first-hand how these people are doing. The remainder of this article will describe what we found.

Hawaii

The Honolulu press has given considerable attention to the problem of homeless Micronesians. We found that a good many Micronesians are on welfare and quite a few have declared themselves homeless, partly because being listed as homeless gives people a leg up on finding affordable housing in a state where even the smallest unit is prohibitively expensive at market prices. We visited two homeless shelters–one for men and the other for women and families–and found a number of Micronesians in each. We even saw a few Micronesians hanging around Ala Moana Park with their possessions in plastic bags. We passed an island family packed into a van, children asleep in the back seat and the trunk piled high with bags of all sorts–what seemed to be the family's household goods. We could only conclude that this family was living out of its van. One Marshallese woman sitting at a park bench with a very large plastic bag beside her told us that she had been staying with her relatives for a while, but left them when the place became very crowded. Over-crowding in housing units seems to be a common occurrence in Hawaii.

Any Micronesian who moves to Hawaii is immediately faced with the high cost of living and the scarcity of affordable housing. Most islanders right off the plane can find a relative with whom to live, but soon they find themselves becoming a burden to their family. They may find a minimum wage job, but they soon learn that they can not support themselves this way, nor do they qualify for government services with a job and a permanent address. With pressures mounting between themselves and their relatives, many new migrants simply move out, declare themselves indigent, and throw themselves on the mercy of the government. It's a survival strategy, but not the kind that is likely to win a good name for Micronesian migrants.

But that's far less than half the story. Many Micronesians we talked to were angry at the "newcomers" for abusing the system and destroying the good reputation they had worked so hard to build up. As everywhere else we went, we found dozens of Micronesians struggling to make ends meet on their low-paying jobs at ABC stores, fast-food outlets and gas stations. One common way of cutting expenses was to cluster in a single apartment or small unit to save money on housing, even though this put newcomers at risk of eviction for overcrowding. The pooled income of these hard-pressed individuals might be sufficient to cover household expenses. We found that immigrants in other places resorted to the same strategy. One family in San Diego, for instance, had five of its eight members working to earn a combined income of $5,000 a month so that they could get by.

To their credit, many of the Micronesians we met were doing far better than just getting by. Serlino Harper, a young Chuukese, came to Hawaii more than ten years ago and lived with his older brother for a while before striking out on his own. His first job was as an employee at McKinley's Car Wash. Today he is the supervisor of the car wash, which employs more than a dozen other Chuukese, and he lives in a small studio apartment with his pet cat. Xavier Fethal from Ulithi, married and with a family of six, has a good job selling medical supplies to hotels and still finds the time to play guitar in a local band and maintain a steady involvement in community activities. Bruce Musrasrik, born in Pohnpei but a resident of Honolulu for several years, manages one of the hotels in Waikiki. Then, too, there is Lubuw Falenruw, a Yapese, one of the most publicized success stories of Micronesians in Hawaii. He is owner of a computer graphics company that employs some 20 people, nets millions each year, and is famous throughout the state for its innovative displays.

The Micronesian migrants in Hawaii, as in other places, gather in their various sub-groups as opportunity permits. At the wake of a young Chuukese man who died in a road accident during our visit, a couple hundred islanders gathered every evening to support the family of the deceased. Each Sunday there are local language Protestant church services conducted in different spots. Two Chuukese ministers preside at weekly services, one of them at a

relatives and serving them first when food is prepared. She has even learned to defer to her older sister by taking on household chores while her sister continues her homework or watching television.

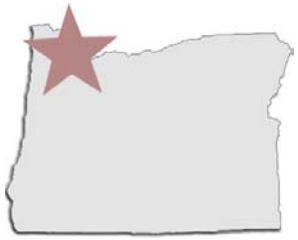
In Oregon, as in other places, Protestants are able to attend Sunday services in their own language, while Catholics must assimilate into local parishes as best they can. Thus, Dio and his family attend mass at St. Lourdes with its international community, afterwards meeting Hispanics, Samoans, Asians and others over coffee and pastries. Chuukese Protestants generally meet on Sunday mornings at a large church in Aurora, an hour's drive from Portland, where Mitaro Dannis and a few other ministers preach in Chuukese and discuss with their congregation the importance of raising funds so that they can build a church of their own.

Elsewhere in Portland Ken Henry in his late forties and Lisa Uehara in her late twenties, work for William C. Earhart Company, a business that helps administer employee benefit plans. Ken, a Pohnpeian married to an American woman, is an accountant, while Lisa, a Chuukese from Weno, is a receptionist. Lisa, her Chuukese husband and their nine children live in a very nice three-bedroom house that they own. Lisa's sister and her family are conveniently settled right next door in a similar house of their own. Next to the children's swings and slides in the back yard there is an earth oven that the two families use to bake pork and breadfruit on special occasions.

For the rest, we have only a hint of the large and dispersed Micronesian community in the region. A Chuukese woman's group comes down from Washington to visit us and discuss their plans to organize island women in the region. Sara Mooteb, a Yapese woman married to a Chuukese man, manages the Nation Car Rental office at the Portland airport. In the terminal we meet a young Palauan who is the ticketing agent for Alaska Airlines. Most of the baggage handlers at the airport, those who work for the airlines and some of the TSA employees who check bags through the scanner, seem to be Chuukese. But this is not much different from other airports we have been through on this trip; we have met Micronesian baggage handlers everywhere.

definitive about the matter: they have no intention of returning to the islands to live.

Portland, Oregon



The Willamette Valley between Portland and Salem has for at least twenty years been one of the favorite destinations of Micronesian migrants. The area represents one of the greatest concentrations of islanders anywhere in the continental US; and if the area is expanded to include the southern part of Washington and eastern Oregon, the Micronesian population probably numbers a few thousand. These people do not comprise a single ethnic group, as does the Springdale community, but they include Palauans and Marshallese as well as FSM citizens of every state. Our short visit to this area could not do justice to the numbers or the cultural diversity of the island population. As a matter of convenience we focused on a very few families in Portland, largely Chuukese.

Dio Thomas, born in Chuuk but now living in Portland with his family, is teaching in a special education program, while his wife works as a security officer responsible for the surveillance of a large public building. Dio and his wife originally attended school in the Portland area and, after a few years in Chuuk following their graduation, returned to Oregon in the late 1980s to find jobs and good schooling for their children. They have three children of their own, but they are also supporting a niece and two nephews who are living with them while attending school. The older daughter is currently pursuing her master's degree, while her brother is just beginning college. Dottie, the youngest in the family and now a high school senior, only visited Chuuk once, as a baby. Even so, by her own admission, she has the hardest time adjusting. American values come easy to this engaging, often outspoken young woman; her problem is modifying her behavior so that it remains in line with the norms laid down by her Chuukese-born parents, and checking her tendency to say just what she thinks. She has learned to swallow her impulse to blurt out her feelings, and with some difficulty she has resigned herself to stooping when passing in front of male

church that is exclusively used by people from Chuuk. As we witnessed again and again, culture and church are the twin ties that bind members of these communities to one another.

Southern California

Our introduction to the Micronesian community here took place in Pasadena at William Carey University, a small evangelical college with a strong missionary emphasis and an international enrollment. Gracefully designed and beautifully shaded, this college offers a warm and welcoming environment for the hundred or so Micronesians in the area. Most are Chuukese, but there are Kosraeans, Palauans and a sprinkling of Pohnpeians in this community. Most of them work for the college in modest jobs–as receptionists, maids, handymen, maintenance men, security guards–and live with their families in housing units rented from the university. All of them participate in the religious life of the university, and a few of them have even enrolled in programs there.

Paul Otoko, a man in his forties whose father was from Nukuoro but who was raised in Chuuk, is the founding figure and the guiding spirit of the community. During his twenty years in Pasadena, Paul has been deeply committed to church work and, in the course of this ministry, has become something of a political activist, often speaking to Native American groups throughout the country. On the last day of our visit, he drove to Santa Barbara to preside at a Sunday service that was largely attended by liberal whites, a congregation with a strong interest in conservation and ethnic rights issues. With him he brought a young choir and dance group, drawn mostly from his family, that was to perform island songs and dances.

Sato Suka, a Chuukese living in San Diego with his wife and family, regularly makes the two-hour drive up to Pasadena to attend Micronesian gatherings there. Sato is the president of an organization known as the Micronesian Outreach Ministry in the USA (MOMUSA), begun ten years ago by a small group of committed Chuukese and which now has extended its work

throughout the western US. Their ministry, which also embraces Palauan and Marshallese communities, is carried out partly through sports programs. On July 4th, the organization held a big gathering in Pasadena at which teams from all over the country met to compete in baseball and basketball during the day, after which they ate together and joined in Christian fellowship marked by prayers and religious songs in the different languages of the islands.

This Christian ministry has proven its effectiveness, if we may use the Pasadena and San Diego Micronesian populations as a measure. The young men who ten or fifteen years ago would have spent most of their weekends knocking down beers have stopped drinking; all have steady jobs that they have kept for long periods of time. The older men in the community seemed proud of the fact that no one was on welfare, and it's unlikely that they would have tolerated anyone who was. Nor was there any evidence that any of their teenage sons were drinking, smoking or engaged in rowdy behavior.

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One evening as I played basketball with some of the young men (and a few of the older ones), younger girls and boys played volleyball on a nearby court while groups of younger children scooted by on their skateboards. There was distinct flavor of wholesomeness about the community, which seemed to have adequate room for Catholics and Protestants both, for Micronesians of every shade. When we gathered for the meal a little later, the songs and prayers came with little effort and the conversation just flowed. This was as close to a model community as we found anywhere in our travels.

Our next stop was San Diego, where we spent more time with many of those we had met at the gathering in Pasadena. John Akapito, a Chuukese who has his master's degree and teaches English to foreign students at National University, cut a fine figure in his suit and tie as we interviewed him in his private office on the

employment. When we asked him why he doesn't return to Chuuk, he explained that he wants a good education for his children, something that he doesn't believe they can get back home.

We found more social tension in Miami than in any of the other places we visited. Four young Chuukese are in jail, serving sentences of between five and ten years for repeated DUI, assault, and statutory rape. We heard stories of young men, drunk on beer and angry at their families, tearing up their apartments, and reports of brawls on the neighborhood basketball court– the kinds of incidents that may be regular occurrences in the islands but which don't help win the good will of folks in a small Oklahoma town. When we drove to the playground one evening, we found the hoops taken down from the backboards and a patrol car parked by the court to guard against trouble. Chuukese report that even at their funerals, when they are singing local hymns and sharing food, neighbors complain to the police about the noise and strange, voodoo-like goings on.

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Most of the people from Fefan, some twenty or thirty of them, work on a large mushroom plantation, one of several such plantations in the area. Julita Namelo, the sister-in-law of the pastor, is the supervisor of the field workers. Upon graduation from a local college, she applied for a job at the factory. When she was preparing to return to Chuuk for a funeral, she was presented with a free ticket by the company and asked to recruit a couple dozen more workers. Now, for all practical purposes, Julita and her daughter run the place. Julita and her family are able to live in relative comfort from what they make. Julita's younger sister and her husband, both of them college graduates, are doing even better; they own their own three-bedroom house and are putting their children through school. When asked if they intend to return to Chuuk, they answer vaguely that they would like to do so sometime in the future, but not anytime soon. Their children are more

tried to enroll his kids in school or gain access to any social services. He started out working for K-Mart as a warehouseman, worked his way up to manager, and later quit to begin his own business. Kernel also serves as pastor to the Pingelapese community in the church that they share with the Neosho Protestant congregation. Anyone from the islands who needs help of any sort–a social security number, a driver's license, a job–always comes to Kernel first.

Micronesians from Neosho and its environs depend heavily on two large factories for employment–La-Z-Boy, which makes chairs, and Twin Rivers Chicken, a factory similar to the well-known Tyson's plant in nearby Springdale–with an estimated 70 or 80 Pohnpeians working at each place. The rest of the Micronesian community in the area work in fast-food places, or as cashiers, drivers or stockboys at Wal-Mart.

It is an easy, hour and a half drive from Neosho to Springdale, the adopted home of thousands of Marshallese (the estimates range from 2,000 to 8,000, with no one pretending to know exactly how many). Marshallese were lured to this small Arkansas town by the promise of boundless employment in the huge Tyson Chicken plant there. A Jehovah Witness woman who speaks Marshallese well and looks out for their community took us on a tour of some of the Marshallese neighborhoods, pointing out the duplex apartments and neat single units in which they live. She told us that many more of the Marshallese employees at the factory are women than men. We observed that in Springdale, as in so many other places, islanders work the graveyard shift, the least desirable one, just as they wind up working in places most others might eschew.

Miami, Oklahoma, is not much more than an hour's drive from Springdale. It has a Chuukese population of about a hundred, most of them from the island of Fefan. Wilson Namelo, who works as a stockman at a warehouse in town, serves as Protestant pastor to the Chuukese and is one of the senior members of their community. He admitted that he is also drawing welfare on behalf of the four of his children who were born in the US and thus are entitled to these benefits. Without welfare, he says, he can not hope to support his wife and eight children, for he is the only one in his family with wage

campus. Like most other Micronesians in the San Diego area, John has close ties with the Micronesian Outreach Ministry based in Pasadena. Sabino Asor, former FSM congressman from Chuuk, is also in San Diego; he currently works in the service department of a car dealership, but aspires to getting into the real estate business before long. His spacious four-bedroom house with garage was rather typical of the homes occupied by Micronesians with large families. At the farewell party they threw for us the evening we left, we met dozens of other islanders, including the offspring of half a dozen well known Chuukese families: Masataka Mori's daughter, Susumu Aizawa's niece, Mitaro Dannis' nephew, Tosiwo Nakayama's granddaughter, and three Narruhn women, among others.

As we chatted, it became clear that the children were much more fluent in English than in their local language, even if both parents were from the same island. At nearly all the social events we attended, the parents used their own language whenever they could, while the young generation spoke English. Young people seemed to have understood the local language when they were spoken to, and they have all learned songs and hymns in an island language, but they did not feel comfortable speaking it. Acculturation happens quickly in the US mainland, much more rapidly, I suspect, than in Hawaii or Guam.

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Along the way, we also met a young man from Yap, who served in the US military for nine years and distinguished himself as a marksman. This man, married to a Mokilese woman who is also serving in the military as a nurse, had interesting things to say about the US armed forces. He observed that he was in the business of teaching others how to take lives, while his wife was commonly called on to assist in trauma cases, including people suffering from gunshot wounds. To work out this incompatibility, the man decided

to retire from the army and study for his degree while his wife continues her work to support the family. Notwithstanding his passion for golf, our Yapese friend said that he has no intention of remaining in the US much longer. He claims he would prefer to return to Yap to find work there if he can.

Corsicana, Texas

Corsicana, an hour's drive from Dallas, might seem an unlikely spot for a Micronesian community, but there are about 300 islanders living there. The origins of this community date back to the late 1970s when dozens of young Micronesians were attending Navarro Community College. One of them was David Manuere, now in his late forties, who stayed on and become the founding figure of the Corsicana community. David, originally from Puluwat in Chuuk, speaks with something close to a Texas drawl, a trait which, like his love of the Dallas Cowboys, he has picked up over the course of his twenty-five years in Corsicana. Since his graduation from Navarro, David began bringing his brothers and sisters and other relatives to join him. At first, his parents didn't like the ideas of his sisters going to the US to live, but in time they relented and eventually moved there themselves. Today David presides over a family numbered in the dozens–and a Micronesian community in the hundreds–from the front of his large home situated on a nine-acre lot that he purchased. While the smaller children play in the pool in the back of the house and his teenage son runs football drills on the lawn, David surveys the crowd that has gathered for a barbeque to welcome his guests. People are drinking cold beer, but there is never any hint of trouble because of the drinking. If there were, either David or Ali, an outer-island Yapese who has been in Texas almost as long as David, would be called on to resolve the problem.

Most of the Micronesian community in the area is outer-island Chuukese, especially Puluwatese and Pulapese, but there are also quite a few Palauans who have stayed on from college days and a handful of Kosraeans and Pingelapese. Golina Alokoa, married to a

tribute from Pohnpeians who are now living 8,000 miles from their own island. Since we arrived the day before Pohnpeians were scheduled to celebrate the July Fourth holiday with baseball games in the southern part of Missouri, we drove off in the same direction everyone else was heading–to Neosho, Missouri, a town of about 10,000.

We joined the 300 or so Micronesians to watch the baseball games and enjoy the mixed buffet, featuring island delicacies like banana *pihlohlo* along with such American standards as spareribs and chicken.

Neosho lies just a bit north of the Missouri-Arkansas border, no more than eighty miles from Springdale, Arkansas, the site of the large Tyson Chicken Factory and home to thousands of Marshallese immigrants. Another fifty miles west of Neosho, just across the state border, is Miami, Oklahoma, a town slightly larger than Neosho that has an island community of its own. We joined the 300 or so Micronesians to watch the baseball games and enjoy the mixed buffet, featuring island delicacies like banana *pihlohlo* along with such American standards as spareribs and chicken. Micronesians came from all over Missouri, some from northern Arkansas and Wichita, and even from as far away as Cincinnati and Corsicana, to attend. Most were Pohnpeians, but there were also a few Chuukese and Marshallese on hand. We were told that Cincinnati would, in turn, host the next Pohnpeian games, scheduled for September 11–a day celebrated on their home island as Liberation Day.

The person who organized the games–and who oversees most other activities that take place in Neosho–is a Pingelapese businessman by the name of Kernel Rehobson. Kernel owns a retail store that is a gathering place for Micronesians from dozens of miles around since he stocks his store with the type of down-home items that are so difficult to find in the US: the large plastic combs that women wear in their hair, zoris, dawasi and brushes for showers, and island-style skirts with embroidered hems. Kernel says that he had his troubles when he first settled in Neosho; people mistook him for a Mexican and kept asking for his papers when he

can afford, but you would never know that he has trouble making ends meet when you meet him. In true island fashion, he entertains us with stories of his experiences in Florida, later insisting on treating us to lunch.

Elaine Helgenberger, like many others recruited to work for SeaWorld, had serious problems with her initial contract. When she broke with the recruiters, however, she returned to the park to seek employment on her own. Now she has been promoted to a supervisory level and continues to work in a job she loves. In the meantime, she married a young man from Chuuk who also migrated to Florida, gave birth to three children, and invited her mother and father to live with her in her large, nicely maintained house. Elaine's children understand Pohnpeian but do not speak it, and the family regularly eats island-style foods like taro, tapioca, yam and fish that they buy from local stores specializing in oriental items. As Elaine tells it, she is living a dream in Orlando. Free from the social pressure that would be brought to bear on her if she were back in Pohnpei, she enjoys the independence that life in the US brings. She has a family, a home, and a good car, but even so she retains some elements of the life she would have lived on Pohnpei. Best of all, she is able to care for her parents in their old age, as she had always hoped to do.

Tri-State Border Area in the Southern Midwest

Our team intended to visit Kansas City, home of a growing Micronesian community, largely Pohnpeian, that sprang from students who attended Park College during the 1970s and 1980s. Small colleges, once well attended by Micronesian students, have frequently served as the seedbeds for migrant communities in the US, accounting in part for the seemingly odd locations of Micronesian strongholds. Kansas City is said to have been constituted a *kousap* by a Pohnpeian chief not long ago when he paid a visit to his compatriots who had settled in that city. He was feted with sakau–the type made from powder rather than pounded–and left a week or two later with several thousand dollars, which had been collected as

Chuukese man from Tamatam, is one of the latter. Like many of the other Micronesians in Corsicana, she works at the National Envelope factory, which together with a Lay chips factory and a Stover's candy factory provide jobs for the vast majority of the islanders in the area. Golina's salary is well above the minimum wage, and she is able to earn additional money by working overtime and on holidays. She and her family live on what is locally known as "Micronesian Boulevard"–a single block in the center of town with nearly all the houses rented by Micronesian families. With representation from Palau, Kosrae, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Yap, "Micronesian Boulevard" is a microcosm of the larger migrant community.

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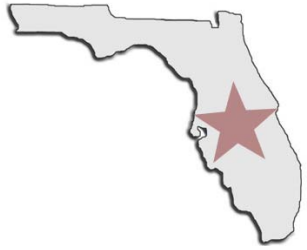
Some of the islanders have resorted to an interesting strategy to provide housing for their families that dates back to the early days of the community. As David Manuere's many relatives began moving into his place, the household had to be thinned out from time to time. As his brothers and sisters began to marry, they would leave the household and, instead of renting an apartment, they would purchase a trailer home. At times two or three couples might live together in a single trailer until one of the couples saved the $10,000 needed to buy a trailer of their own. We were shown four or five of these trailers, some owned by Chuukese and others by Pingelapese, parked next to one another on a leased plot of land. Our guide told us that plans are already underway to purchase the land outright, thus entirely eliminating any rental costs for land or housing in the future.

One of the icons of the Corsicana community, by all accounts, is a Palauan woman by the name of Grace. Like so many others, she attended Navarro Community College and after graduation decided to stay. She is the manager of a Pizza Hut in the middle of town where she has worked for eighteen years. As part of her work, she supervises eight employees, half of whom are also Palauan. Her life has been a model of persistence in carrying out her responsibilities for her work and family. Others like her have worked

their way up to the managerial level. She told us that she would hope to return home one day after her retirement, but for the present she has a good salary and a generous pension for her retirement. As much as she misses the laid-back pace of life at home, Grace plans to continue working in Corsicana as long as she can. After all, she reflects, there will always be time to enjoy the slow life in the islands after retirement.

Central Florida



This community–if it can be called that–is spread throughout an area that extends from Orlando to Tampa and Clearwater. This place differs from the other destinations we visited in that there are no senior founders of this community, "elders" who pull people together for gatherings and resolve community problems. Nearly all the Micronesians who settled in central Florida were brought out by recruiters to work at SeaWorld, Disney World, Busch Gardens, or one of the several nursing homes in the area. The community here, which is heavily Pohnpeian but with a few Mortlockese thrown into the mix, is composed mainly of young men and their starter families. We met no one who was there longer than ten years, and most have lived in central Florida for just five or six years. This group lacks the experienced leadership that has proven vital for binding together individuals in other migrant communities.

The final evening of our stay in Orlando, thirty or forty people gathered for a barbeque at the new housing complex at which some of them live. This was the kind of event that could have taken place anywhere in the islands. While the young men played basketball on the nearby court and the children amused themselves in small groups, the women uncovered trays of food that they had brought for the supper. There was little formality to the affair; people drifted over to fill their paper plates when they were ready to eat. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the party was the age of those who attended; none of the Micronesians there looked older than 35.

About five or six years ago, hundreds of islanders were recruited

on Pohnpei and nearby islands to come to Orlando, where they were housed in company-owned apartments and given jobs at SeaWorld. To their chagrin, they found that large deductions were being made from their paychecks to reimburse the recruiting agency for costs that they expected the company to absorb. Most soon left in frustration and struck out for other places and new jobs. Several found employment in one or another of the convention centers in the area. Their work consists of setting up tables for displays, hauling chairs into conference rooms, and decorating the stages for presentations. Gaylord Palms Convention Center alone employs nineteen Micronesians. Their Samoan supervisor, a middle-aged man by the name of Seven, praises them lavishly for their hard work, while he also notes that their affability and proficiency in English make it much easier for them to work with others.

Some of the migrants have continued working in the theme parks. One young man operates the kiddie rollercoaster at SeaWorld while a Pohnpeian woman works the sky lift at Busch Gardens. Most, however, seem to hold jobs in food services, like the young lady from Pohnpei we found rolling cinnamon sticks in another part of the park. All seem to get along very well with their coworkers and enjoy the respect of their bosses.

A small Japanese restaurant called Kanpai employs seven Micronesians, one as hostess and six as chefs. When we went there for dinner one evening, we were treated to a virtuoso performance demonstrating what the Pohnpeian chefs could do with a knife, a hot grill, and bowls of vegetables and meat. The chefs came out, each in front of a grill surrounded by patrons, and did a juggling act with knives and food, as they chopped at lightning speed, swirled and twirled food on the grill faster than we could follow, and doffed their chef hats for the applause that followed their act.

A number of Micronesians in the area are working in nursing homes, while many others hold similar jobs in other states. Mike, a young man of Pohnpeian-Ngatikese parentage, has taken a full-time job at a nursing home in Clearwater to support his wife and one-year old child. Since his pay is so low, he has to supplement his income by working overtime whenever he can. A small apartment is all he