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Peace in Paradise

Article by Chuck Bingaman
Contributing Writer
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From Surry to Samoa

One-time Surry resident Taialofa Petrini and her husband, Kevin, own and operate a yoga-oriented travel adventure company in Samoa.

Travel, page D-7

By **CHUCK BINGAMAN**
Contributing Writer

No, this is not a newly discovered James Michener short story. Or a fantasy romance novel preview. But it does have elements of each.

Although she grew up in Surry, Taialofa Petrini was born on the tiny remote island of Savai'i in the South Pacific country of Samoa, given a name meaning "love by the sea" and spent her first year in a thatched-roof hut surrounded by warm and loving natives.

Samoa, an independent island nation halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand and smaller than Rhode Island, features golden beaches, rainforest-covered mountains, dramatic waterfalls and foaming blowholes.

Years later she would return to Savai'i for a visit, meet a young Peace Corps volunteer from Connecticut named Kevin Petrini under the swaying palms of a tropical beach, and instantly recognize her life's future.

Now, the Petrinis (who were married in Walpole in 2002) run a yoga-oriented travel adventure company in Samoa called Raw Shakti Yoga Adventure Travel.

"Raw Shakti means 'pure creative life force,'" said Taialofa Petrini, 31, in an interview with The Sentinel. "Shakti is the creative life force held at the base of the spine. We encourage people to tap into their creative potential. What makes Raw Shakti unique is our emphasis on the total yoga lifestyle. It encourages the creative life force (the Shakti) to become nourished inside all of us in our own unique way."

Petrini's life in Samoa reflects that of two people close to her heart, her parents, Josephine and J.C. Russell. The couple were Peace Corps volunteer teachers themselves in Samoa from 1973 to 1976 on the island of Savai'i.

Their house, called a fale in Samoan language, was constructed of all traditional mate-

rials, including thatched roof, poles bound with coconut fiber and blinds made of pandanus leaves. It looked out on the turquoise sea.

Following their Peace Corps service, Petrini's parents returned to the U.S., and her mother began a 30-year yoga study, practice and teaching career in Keene, Walpole and surrounding communities that continues today. Russell, 58, and husband J.C., an elementary school teacher, live in Surry.

Russell started practicing yoga when she was in college and took a trip to India. All four of their children, Petrini,

Bryan, Eric and Veronica, practice yoga. Bryan, 25, recently designed a Web site, www.keeneonyoga.com, that coordinates yoga classes in the region.

Petrini said she was inspired by her mother's yoga practice.

"My mother is an extraordinary teacher," Petrini said. "She lives her practice and is able to bring the yoga retreat-lifestyle home to her everyday life."

"She cultivates mindfulness, is an exquisitely healthy vegetarian gourmet cook and takes time to love her family, to teach yoga and to read yoga texts. She is fun, too. Her influence on me has been, and is, huge."

Russell focuses on "meditation in motion." She teaches a complete lifestyle, not simply a practice of asanas (postures). Within her asana teaching, she focuses on the meditative aspect of breathing steadily and being "present" within the practice.

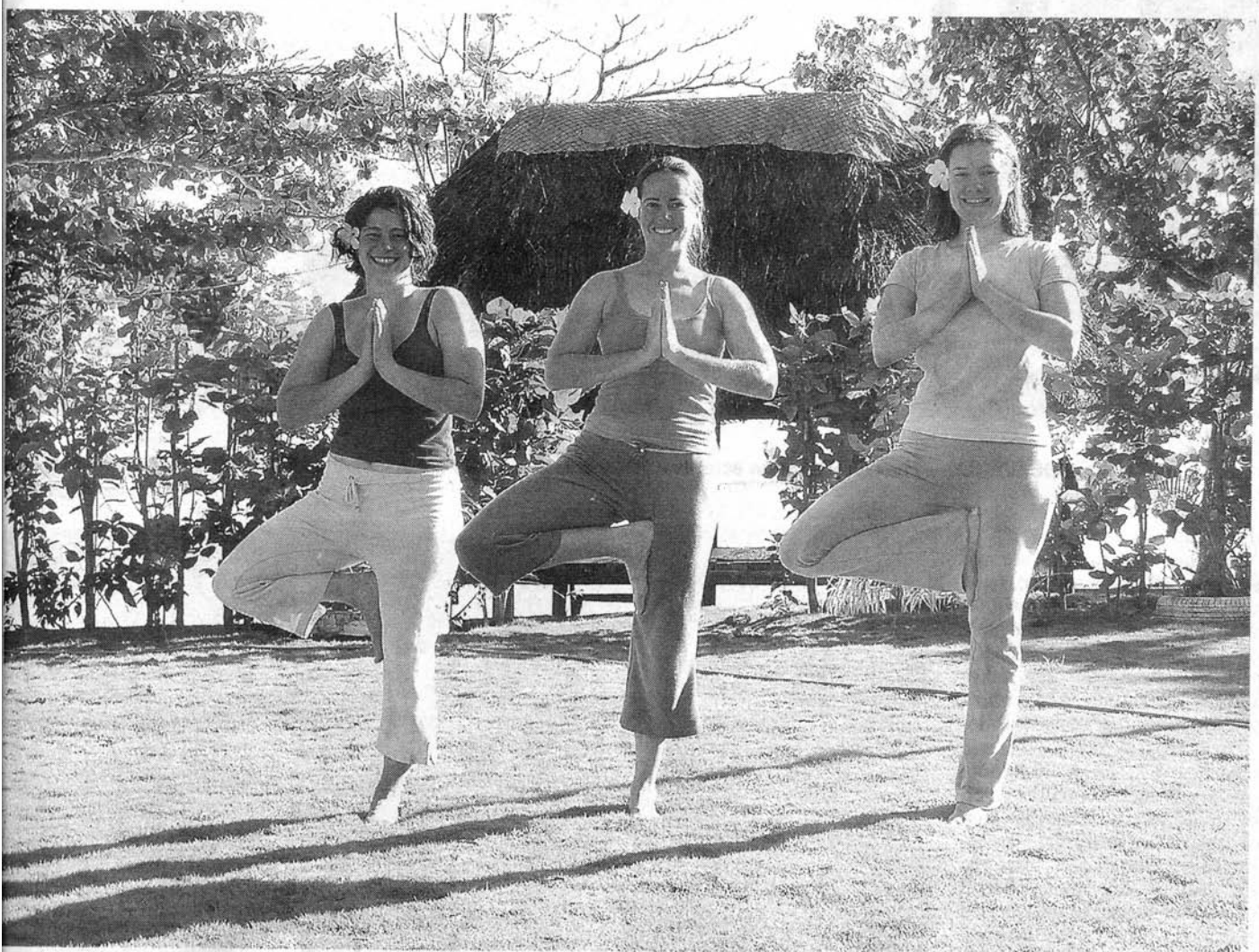
From the road trips of youth to yoga trips

Extended summer vacations were a key part of the Russell family lifestyle for Petrini and her three siblings.

In fact, the family took six- and eight-week summer vacations all over the U.S. and Canada in her youth and enjoyed ca-

Peace in paradise

Former Surry resident starts adventure yoga travel business in Samoa



COURTESY PHOTO

STRIKE A POSE — Taialofa Petrini, center, leads a yoga class in Samoa, where she relocated after growing up in Surry. Petrini and her husband Kevin own and operate a travel company there.

noeing, hiking and camping.

"We learned to work well together, spend time together well, respect our differences and see them as assets. When I think about it, creating our yoga adventure travel company makes perfect sense, considering the lifestyle I was raised in."

Petrini is now focusing on planning the upcoming yoga retreat in Samoa she is offering jointly with her mother from June 27 through July 11.

Petrini's brother Bryan and Russell are leading a yoga and canoeing adventure in Canada in August. Petrini and Bryan are leading a yoga adventure tour in

Peru in October.

"In yoga-oriented travel," Petrini said, "We've found a latent market that is about to boom. People got off the bus tours a decade ago and they went for more activity-based cruises and backpacking adventures, and they want to get healthy with yoga as they travel, too. Yoga is more popular than ever in America now."

"The great thing," she emphasized, "is that people of all ages and body types can participate. It works to cultivate balanced living and a feeling of health that we all crave. People seem to be realizing that they need to be proactive with their bodies and minds if they want to feel happy and healthy."

Dreams of helping make the world more peaceful

This month, Petrini and her husband, Kevin, have been conducting yoga classes for the prime minister of Samoa and most of the members of the Samoan parliament at a two-week retreat they hold following elections there. The group lives, works and sleeps together in a large room for the duration of the retreat. They rise at 5:30 a.m., sing together and practice yoga. The opportunity has confirmed for the Petrinis that they have found their mission in life.

But how does a young couple seeking and selling a serene, peaceful lifestyle actually find it while teaching classes, organizing, marketing and leading exot-

ic adventure tours worldwide?

"The daily practice (sadhana)," Petrini said, "is the most important thing, especially to wake up each day and make time for yoga. ... The busier we are the more we need to create space for rejuvenation through yoga, meditation or quiet relaxation.

"We both have our dreams of helping the world to be a more peaceful place."

For more information about Raw Shakti Yoga Adventure Travel or Josephine Russell's local yoga classes, go to www.rawshakti.com or call 888-yoga123 or 352-1684.