

The room we were sitting in had been Robert Louis Stevenson's lounge. The antiquated writing table and faded photographs of the Stevenson family posed with their loyal Samoan servants preserved the author's presence here.

As Adam was relishing the last of his chocolate cake and Simone had finished exchanging orange marmalade recipes with the Queen, we brought our visit to a close. We took leave of our hosts, thanking them again for their spontaneous hospitality. The King asked us to please come again "whenever you are in Samoa."

On the way out we looked in on the great Dining Hall downstairs, where Stevenson had often entertained dozens of guests around an enormous table. I imagined the scene: surrounded by family, devoted Samoan friends and loyal servants, tall, gaunt Robert Louis Stevenson stood there intoning one of his self-composed prayers before the meal began.

As we emerged from the house a husky Samoan policeman in blue cap and starched white skirt strode briskly up to me. "Are you a detective from New York?" he asked. Bewildered and wary, but encouraged by his smile, I answered simply that I was from New York. A puzzled look crossed his face.

Back in the taxi, Tom provided an explanation: when we had been seen going into the official residence with the King and Queen, the single policeman on duty nearby had not acted quickly enough to check up on us. He quickly went to Tom and questioned him anxiously: "Who were these people who had gone inside?"

"I told him not to worry," Tom boasted. "I said you were a detective from New York - and also an agent for Scotland Yard."

I winced. Even Robert Louis Stevenson with his fertile imagination wouldn't have thought of that one.

****Jack Goldfarb has been writing about travel for over 30 years. He has lived in Europe and the Middle East and has visited about 110 countries.***

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