

TOPIC: FOOD HABIT

Investigator: Willie

Informant: Seini of Kalabu Naitasiri Age: 43 yrs

FOOD HABIT

Our informant is Seini Tawa of Kalabu, Naitasiri. I will be interviewing her on the different dishes they used to have in the olde days, how they prepare it, the names of each dish and how it is eaten. And she is here to help us.

Thank you. There are those who are much older than me and they can give you more information about our topic. As you've seen that I am in my mid forties which is not very old, I will only tell you about some of the food habits used by our ancestors although my age is not one that was alive during that time. But I would try to be helpful in trying to get and give as much information to help our generations to come.

Let's begin with that food referred to as KAKAWA DINA and under this subheading we have SULO. In Kalabu we call it sulo but in the Bauana dialect, they call it dalo or taro. This food can be plained boiled or cooked in the ground oven, it can also be broiled over an open fire. You can use those methods to cook your taro. If it's cooked in a ground oven to bake you will need a LOVO. You do it the same way as we do it today and this was also the way that our ancestors did it. A pit is dug, a fire lit on top of this pit after arranging your firewood on top of that small pit and you place your stones on top of that burning fire. When your fire dies down, the rocks should be nice and red hot by now and then you do it just the same way we are going

it today because it was the same way our ancestors did it. Then you place food in and let it cook. If you are boiling it, all you have to do is get your taro and cook it. When you cook, there are so many different types of pots you could use. My grandmother used to have this special pot for cooking taro in. They refer to this kind of pot as KURO NI VITI which means Fijian pot. This pot is made of clay and soil and the shape is that of a jar. It has sort of a long neck, broad at the bottom and the mouth is quite big. It has got it's own special shape but it does not have a lid. If you're cooking something in the pot, all you need to cover the food with is some leaves, large enough to cover the mouth of the pot. The leaves are arranged neatly as if you're making something round, you tie them up and this is going to be your lid. This Fijian pot is not like other pots. The one I saw, the pot remain at it's place and after the food is cooked, they don't move the pot from there. You have your SUE or two irons placed on some wood not far apart, and it is meant to hold the pot there while cooking. When your cooking your food you can have just little water at the bottom of the pot, enough to boil. The food is filled up to the pot and the most suprising thing is that it is all cooked. You just put your food and you slowly let it cook. When it is time to dish is out, the pot remains on the fire and all they do is take a fork or stick and fork the food out and you just have a bowl of water beside you, you take the food from the pot, place it on the plate. Then you wash your hands on that bowl of water, then you again dip your hand into pot and bring up another food. The bi-valve shells are used for cleaning the taro up or to re-

move the skin. They have these shells hanged from a place on the wall or they keep it on a tin or basket. You get one shell, scrape the taro and you clean it very nicely before you place it on your plate. When it is all cleaned, it is ready to be eaten. Today, we often peel our taro , place it on a pot and then cook it. When it is all cooked all we have to do is to spill out the water but the Fijian pot or KURO WAKAVITI it is different. If we want to broil our taro, we just light our fire and on top of the red charcoals, you just place the taro on top and you just turn it around so that all the sides get enough heat to cook it with. If you're in the bush and you can't clean it with a shell, you just cut a stick and sharpen it then you use that to scrape the skin off. After that you just use your hand to clear away any other thing sticking onto the taro. Then, you're ready to eat it.

The ROUROU or taro leaves is also eaten. This plant, the taro, all the parts of the taro plant is used. Especially by our ancestors. You can eat the taro, the stems and the leaves. To have it YALITARA, a method of cooking taro leaves, you just boil your water, add a pinch of salt followed by your taro leaves. You just let it boil for a while then you stir it. Let it boil twice then you remove it from the fire because it is cooked by then. In Bauan dialect they call it ROUROU VAKARAKARA but it is YALITARA in my dialect. Another method is to CAWE and we are still on taro leaves. You get your taro leaves, place them one on top of the other, roll it up and neatly and firmly tie the ends up with a string of pandanus leaves. When you know that your pot of taro is boiling well with it's lid on top, you place

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it on top of your taro to cook it together or any pot that is on the fire. You cover the pot well with it's lid and then you get something to hold the lid down. This is you place it on top of the lid. When it is cooked, you get your taro leaves into a plate, cut it up and you can add your lemon juice, chillies and what else you want to have with your taro leaves.

And another method is to broil your rourou leaves. You just get enough taro leaves and some banana leaves. You get that, place your banana leaves underneath and you arrange your taro leaves on top of that. You just add a bit of salt, you can also cut up some onions and place it inside there too. Today, we have onions but not during our ancestors days, so they must have just plain taro leaves. You just roll up your taro leaves and then tie it up. Light your fire and then let it die down and then you place your bundle on top of those red charcoals. If you have a tin sheet, you can have your food or your taro leaves placed on top of that sheet of iron. You need to turn it over and over. When you see that one side is burning up you turn it over. When you know that it is cooked, you get it out, cut it up and you can eat it. Today, we have many other things which we can use to make our food taste better than what our ancestors used to have in the olde days. We've got salad oil, coconuts and meat foods which is cooked with the taro leaves and makes it very tasty.

Let's go back to the stem of the taro plant. It is also eaten and there are ways of preparing it before it is eaten. I've met many women who eat this kind of thing because it is a tradition to our women who has just given birth. This is what they did,

they cook the whole thing. Before that, they cut the stems up and they remove the outer skin and then they boil it. When they know that it is cooked, they get it out and then they dry it. It can be eaten with the water that you cooked the stems in. And also you can eat it with BANA.

There is another method that you could use is called WAITANITANI. You boil your water. Bring your stems of taro and cut them short and the outer skin is also removed. When the water boils you just add your stems and leave it to cook for about sometimes and you remove it again. You place them inside a pot then you start shredding them into small ones. After you do that, you place it in one pot, get your lemons and squeeze it in. You add your chilly and that's that nothing else to need to add there. You are now ready to eat it. That is how they make use of the taro, taro leaves, and stems. Not one single part of the taro plant is thrown away.

- What can you say about this plant called the OTA, how do they prepare it and what can be done about it if they've got it at home?

As for the OTA, we know that there are two types of OTA. One is known as OTA DINA and another is OTA LA. The OTA LA is said to be itchy sometimes if it is not cooked properly and you need to change the water twice before it boils for the second time and then have it eaten. We've got OTA DINA and another type called LALABE and another called DIBI. There is another which is similar to the creepers used for house-building and this one it is just plain boil. All you have to do is get some and cook it in that pot of boiling water. When it is cooked,

you remove it from the pot and you just get one stick, remove the leaves and just eat them. Today, we removed the leaves then we have it cooked but in the olden days, they don't have this sort of thing. They cook it together with the stems.

- What can you say about this food called the DIBI. I heard that you said you can use the whole plant, that is, you can use the leaves and the stems.....

Yes. The DIBI is a wild plant and there are many types of this plant that you find growing wild but they look similar to DIBI plant. The largest one of this variety is not called DIBI but that is BASUVE and the largest one is BALABALA. Well the DIBI our ancestors used the stems to beat a LALI. They just cut the branch up and you can eat the leaves. After you've got three cuttings there, what you do is that you bite one and the other two using it, you beat it like you beating a LALI. I've done it myself and it is great fun. Not everyone can do that but maybe you try and see what it is like.

- There is another kind of food prepared and that is the DUNA or eel. Could you tell me how this eel is cooked before it is eaten?

Ye. Well, the DUNA in the Bauan dialect it is called DUNA but in my dialect it is called REWAI. From my days when I could understand many things there are varieties of this aquatic fish, or more like a fish. One is called BIRIA, BONU SOQE and there are some others but they are all called REWAI. The only difference is their shape, their colour and environment. They say that the BADAMU is the most dangerous of all of the eels. It is long and very tasty when you eat it, It can also bite which in turn

can be very dangerous because it can be poisonous. The other one, BIRIA, is short and is spotted. The eel called the BONUSOQE when you spot one, you can easily tell that is one because it's got large saucy eyes compared to it's body size. I've seen one and I know them if I see one. Well, there are some methods of catching these eels. You can use your net to catch them, you can just use your light to find them or fish them your fishing line come into use in this case. If not you could just go out and try stepping on them. Before you catch it and take it home. We call it BUBURU. That is they use a long stick and at the end of that stick they got this piece of wire stuck on it and then you go out to this swampy places where you know eels make their home. You just step on to the swamp and you hold your stick ready. Some people are very skilled in doing this. They just poke the stick in and they know, when they've hit an eel. They dig their hands in doing this and they try to bring it up to the surface and then it is beaten up. That is one way of catching eel here at Kalabu, Either they fish it using a fishing line or the method called BUBURA is used or CINAVI and that is to catch the eel using torchlight or benzine light. When you think you've got enough, you bring it in then you cook it after you've cleaned it and removing the inside. If you don't want to boil it you can have it broiled or KOVU. You tie up the eel in banana leaves and then you cook it. If you're cooking it or make a KOVU, the first thing you do is get some banana leaves not just any kind, you get the leaf that is young and it is just beginning to open up well, you get that. You heat that over the fire then you remove the hard vein at the back of the leaf, then

you fold it in half. When you get your eel, place it inside, add your salt, chilly and whatever you want to add then you fold it up to make a bud-shape. The vein that you remove from the leaf could be used to tie the thing up again. Today, we can use nylon strings, strips of cloths or some other things that can hold. But what my father used that I saw is the vein of that banana leaf. After you've tied that up, then you have another wrapper outside. You could have sugar cane leaves for that matter or coconut leaves. When you do this make sure you cover the whole banana leaves then you cook it.

- How do you prepare this food called BELEBELENI SUKAU?

The BELEBELENI SUKAU is a tree, a plant, it grows wild and it bears fruit annually. There is a time when the leaves are young and green, usually from a new bud and then it bears fruits. You can eat the leaves and it's fruits. You can cook it and eat it raw or have it cooked first. The flesh inside is like that of a coconut and that is the SUKAU fruit. The leaves, you pick them up and you bring them home. You tie them up and you can cook it together with prawns or fish, and you cook it in coconut cream or LOLO. But you can have it plain boiled or in LOLO.

- You've mentioned that our ancestors eat food that are mainly broiled or steamed, plain boiled in a pot or baked in a LOVO. I heard that they also use this bamboo sticks.....

Yes, We have bamboo sticks and it is also referred to as bamboo pots. That is useful when you go into the bush or forest. You've got your knife, salt matches and other things that might be needed while you are out there in your garden. If you forgot your matches, I've seen it done many times. A way of lighting

a fire when you havent got a match and it is called NITA. The NITA, when you go out to the bush or your plantation, you can easily obtain your light by cutting two pieces of wood, one of the two sticks should be sharpened at the edge and the other one to be made flat. Then you take the one with the pointed edge and you rub it on the wood with the flat surface. You keep on rubbing it and you would be surprised to find it lighting up a little and then you just add some dry leaves or dry brushes, your fire is now ready. All you have to do now is add large pieces of wood and you put on whatever you want to cook. I first heard it from my people and I've seen it the way it's done by the young men and that was when I was very young. But if you can't do the NITA and you've got your matches, you'll just have to light you fire, you just pick up those dry pieces of wood you find on the way, pile them up then you light it up and try to make it burn well. Many things especially plants that provide food grow wild in the bush and all you have to do is look around for it and gig them up and try to make it cooked. It could be wild yams and sweet potatoes. You bring them out peel it and have it ready. You cut down a bamboo, not a bamboo trunk that is already matured, you cut down one that is quite young. The reason you use the young bamboo so that when you add your food into the bamboo and place it on top of the fire the heat can easily get iside because the surface is not very hard but if you use thematured bamboo sticks, the layer is very thick and you might not be able to have your food cooked by

the time the fire goes out. After you've peeled your food, cut it into small suitable sizes so that it can fit into the small mouth of the bamboo stick, pile them in, together with your SICI, DIBI leaves, LALABE or OTA. You then get some leaves which you know that can cove the mouth of the bamboo then you close it. You take some leaves, do that and you take your bamboo and you lie it on top of the hot charcoals and then you watch it. You can turn it on top of the hot cahrcoals ~~xxx~~ turn it over and over and when you see that all your firewood had gone out and the whole bamboo is completely brown that means that your food is cooked. You bring it out and now the bamboo pot is no longer hard but it is soft. When you remove the lid, you can smell the food that you cooked and how nice it smells that is waters your mouth. You just get your food out and then you settle down to a big lunch.

- You were telling me that you can use bamboo pots to cook leafy vegetables like taro leaves.....

Yes, you can sook your leafy vegetables like taro leaves ~~px px~~ or rourou or ota. You just bring your rourou just like the way you cook your rourou in a pot. Then you add your water, close the top with a leaf and you again put it on top of your fire lenghtwise.

- Thank you as we all know that abundance of food is found in the sea. Some of our fishermen knows how to make use of them when they go out to the sea. They normally eat these sea-foods raw. Could you explain how they eat it, they just catch it and eat it straight away or what do they do about it? You comapre this with that eaten in the bush.

The only food that I know of that's eaten raw when we go out into the bush is the DURUKA- a plant resembling a sugarcane - we just have to break it from the plant, remove the outer leaves then you eat the flowery-like flesh inside those leaves. We have fruits around us because they grow wild in the bush and plants like that. As for fleshy foods like meat, beef, and pork, we do not eat them raw, firstly it has to be cooked before they are eaten. The only food that we eat raw are DURUKA, SAKIKI and fruits like VUTU, KAVIKA, MAQO and WI. These fruits are always eaten raw. These are the only food that I know of that can be eaten raw.

- You mentioned something about these foods like SAKIKI. Could you explain what these food like and what does it looks like? The SAKIKI is a plant that grows wild in the bush and it's shape is like that of a NIU SAWA. The fruit of a NUI SAWA is larger and much bigger than the SAKIKI and I've seen the chiefly food from YASAWA and that is the BUA. Well the plant is like the BUA but the plant is larger and than the latter. But if you want to eat the SAKIKI, look for it's plant that are still young and only the fruits from the young SAKIKI plant can be eaten not the one's from the large trees. Also you can sook the leaves and eat it.

- What can you say about this food which is eaten raw by our ancestors and it is called the SORUA?

Yes. That is another type of food that we can get from the bush and to us, it is called the DREGA SORUA. This plant is also a big plant with large leaves and if you go into the bush and you spot it, try it. We always eat it like chewing gum and maybe

it was the only way to get your chewing gum, you cut down one of these large leaves, place it underneath your tree, then you cut at the bark so that the gums seeps out from the place you cut the bark. And when they all came out they'll drip down onto it's leaf you've got prepared underneath so that it dries out there. And also you can do the same thing to a breadfruit tree or UTO. You can also get chewing gum from breadfruit trees. When you see that the liquid which you got from the tree had dried up, all you do now is pop it into your mouth and chew it. It is just like any ordinary man-made chewing gum but the only difference is the smell.

- Is this type of food similar to one that you've already mentioned called WALAI?

Yes. When you are walking along the bush or forest and you can't spot a place where you can get a drink of water, I've experienced it and it is a custom of our ancestors. When they come across a large WALAI plant, they cut it down. When you cut it down, the same moment water drips down from the plant. You drink it up and you will be surprised to know that it tastes just like tap water.

- From the beginning, you said that some food can be smoke-dried and in Fijian we call it VESA. Could you describe how it is done and what it is like?

Yes. We have a kind of eel which we call REWA TAUBALE. This eel or rewai taubale lives on dry land most of it's life. They are large eels and maybe some other people who are much older than me can describe to you about the shapes and sizes since this lived a long time ago. They say that these types of eels

you'll have to use those spears used for pig-hunting. You need a big weapon for it because of the size of these eels. Those eels that live in the water are very easy to kill but these ones or the ~~mewai~~ taubale on dry land, would need skill and patience. These eels are just second to snakes. You can kill them using a pig-hunting spear or something called the KIA.

- You mentioned something about the URA or prawns somewhere along our talk. Your getting your prawns and how you cook it. Could you elaborate on that?

The prawns we can catch then from a stream or a small creek or pond. I only know that they use nets to catch prawns but maybe during our ancestors days, they must have catch it with their own hands. Today, men use glasses and what not to easy the way of catching food. Some might have used small fishing spears or just their two hands. But the period of time that I happen to know revealed that they use nets to catch these prawns. We often go down to a stream or to a not a very large river. Sometimes we look for small ponds and what we do, we remove all the water or bale all the water from the pond. When all the water had been removed, all we need to do now is catch the prawns in the pond. If we do not do this, we catch them using a torchlight.

- I heard that some of the very rich in fat foods catch and eaten by our ancestors are bats or BEKA and other one is called SOQE or pigeons. Could you say something about how they cook this food and what they do with it?

You said the pigeon and the bats are two rich in fat. I've seen my father catching these pigeons and cooking them. The pigeons love to eat these fruits called ASIVETELI and they often come near our home because this plant is growing beside our house.

And how they catch them, the method I've seen, when they are still hanging from the tree resting, they run towards it, and then they shake the whole plant until the bat falls down, then they kill it. They keep on with it until they know they ~~they~~'ve caught enough. Nothing else is done to it. You just bring it home and have it cooked in a pot. The fur~~x~~ and everything, all inside the pot, you don't have to take anything out from the bat before you cook it, or put it over a fire first, you cook it straight away. You eat all the parts, nothing is left out except the bones. The skin, it's wings and it's internal parts are eaten.

- Since you're from Kalabu, could you tell me what is your chiefly food?

Before we go into this thing about chiefly food I would like to explain to you about this other bat that I told you of. There is one bat that's got a tail like a mouse, not very large and not very small. We don't kill them in our place here in Kalabu. There are two large caves and in they live there. The caves is shaped like a house and when you go inside the cave, you have to take a light with you. The cave goes deep down and Kalabu is~~x~~ on top of that cave because I haven't been there. Someone can explain it well than me. Inside the cave, you would be surprised to see that the whole cave is covered with bats but these bats got tails and when you bring these bats you can bring them home in fifties and hundreds. And you just pile them all inside a pot like you cooking a big pot of meat. There is another method of cooking it that I've seen done by our young men in the village. They catch their bats and they break some SONI plants and bring it along with them. It is cut down with

with it's leaves because we all know how sharp the spikes are. You get our bamboo stick, tie up how many bunches of the SONI plant then you tie this on top of your bamboo stick then you go inside the cave. The bats are just flying all over you, and you hold your bamboo stick up, all those bats flying around will get stuck on the SONI plant. When the SONI leaves touch them, it holds them there, they can't do anything more, just waiting to be killed and straight into the big cooking pot. Sometimes, when you lower your bamboo sticks, you would be surprised to find the number of bats caught in your trap. You can pile them inside a bag. That is one way of catching these bats by using that easy trap. We still use it today and maybe it was a method used by our ancestors. Nothing else is done to it, we just bring it home and cook it just like when we cook the other ordinary bats. The bats' shit are used as manure for our gardens. When I was in school, we used to go inside the cave to dig it up and spread it on our gardens. We can also apply it on our garden beds and on other useful plants. You just get your bats, cook it and you're now ready to eat it.

- As ~~you~~ I've been discussing about food, we've gone through some of our native dishes. Could you tell me a particular type of food or some of the dishes that our ancestors love most. Like they prefer that food more often to the other dishes. They ask for that particular food to be cooked most of the time. You mean the type of food that is eaten most of the time or more often or that we have for a feast. The chiefly food that we have is prawns and it is specially prepared for the feast when we have a meeting for chief or any other village function. And the other one is the eel.

- I was asking you if you could explain to me what type of food that is ~~s~~ooked for our ancetors that they like most. The food that is cooked in an oven, or broiled or smoke dried. Could you talk on that.....

For our ancetors, their everyday food, since they are staying in the village, they can just help themselves to anything they want. They just get their cassava, taro or yams and they cook it the way they like it. They can eat it with taro leaves, ota, or anything else ~~whifif~~ which they prefer. Today, we have got salad oil, coconuts to make our LOLO and some other things to make our food ~~taset~~ much better. If they go out to catch bats at night, when theyreturn, they cook it and then they can have that for breakfast or lunch.

- Before we bring our talk to an end, would you tell me something about this food that our ancestors eat more often which is called MADRAIVAKAVITI or Fijian bread.

The MADRAIVAKAVITI or thisnative bread is referred to as BILA. We use casavva, peel it and you wash it nicely. After you've washed it ~~they~~ you dry it and pound it up. After that, you leave it out in the sun to dry it. ~~XXXX~~

Peel your cassava, wash it nicely then you submerge it in water for four nights then you take it out and dry it in the sun. When you know that it is dry, then you grate it. Soem people grate it, some pound it up. They've got this wooden bowls and wooden hammers that they make out of wood so that they can use it when they want to make BILA or any other type of food. After

you've done that, you make balls out of what you've got, then you keep the rest. You wrap it up in VASILI leaves. When you see that it's cooked, you remove it and you can eat it now.

- Is there any food that you have here that is cooked just by drying it out in the sun? After drying it out or maybe having it cooked that way, do you eat it straightaway or what to do you about these kinds of food cooked using sun's energy?

We do not have any kind of food cooked thisway.

- Thank you very much. If you would like to say something more about our topic, maybe you would like to say it now?

I forgot to mention the method that we use to catch prawns. If we are using a torchlight to catch prawns, we don't have torchlights in the olden days anyway. So, we use bamboo sticks. We break the bamboo sticks and we tie them up and light it. After we've got it burning, we use that to try and catch prawns.

- What can you say about the difference between the way of preparing food in the olden days and those we have today?

I would just like to share with you something about this new change of life we are undergoing today. When I was a kid when I met many changes and things, some I've just shared with you and since I've grown up now I've seen a great change taking place. Like I can do what I've just been telling you and do all the work involving in the preparation of a particular dish. Many of us today do not know of these things. They find it hard to cook in an open fire. It is easy to use an electric stove the fire. I've seen the things used by our ancestors need a patience, hard work, dedication and strength. Well, today we are relaxing away and it is a very sad thing to me to see our

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ancestors way of life disappearing slowly. As I've said, things are easy to ge today and easu to obtain them because we've got more and advance equipment to use. That is all.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. SEINI.

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