

Man Behind Te'o Hoax Comes Clean

Written by Sean Stires

Thursday, 31 January 2013 15:59



Slowly but surely Manti Te'o continues to become vindicated. The man who says he was the mastermind behind the Lennay Kekua hoax perpetrated on Te'o told Dr. Phil McGraw that he fell in love with the former Notre Dame linebacker.

Ronaiah Tuiasosopo made his first public comments on "The Dr. Phil Show" on Thursday in the first of a two-part interview. The interview took place in a one-on-one setting in McGraw's own home.

McGraw began the interview by first confirming Tuiasosopo's identity and then by asking the 22-year-old Californian if he began the relationship to either try to obtain money or to try to gain some sort of personal or professional advantage for himself.

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"No, never," Tuiasosopo replied. "If you look over any interview that Manti ever released and whenever you reflect on Lennay, he said nothing but things about how her heart and her character had had a major impact on him. Thought it was deceptive, it was a lot of positive that came out of it."

"I didn't ask him for anything," he continued. "I didn't ask him for money, I didn't even ask not even for any autograph. Nothing. I didn't ask for anything. I never wanted anything."

Tuiasosopo said the name "Lennay" is a derivative of his mother and grandmother's names. He says the first contact with Te'o came via Facebook when Te'o sent "Lennay" a friend request. The request came shortly after Tuiasosopo had become Facebook friends with Te'o's cousin.

Tuiasosopo confirmed he met the night before the USC game, and photos were shown of the two men talking. However, Tuiasosopo confirmed that Te'o had no idea who he was.

"It was really awkward at first," Tuiasosopo recalled of the meeting. "I wanted to tell him everything right then and there, and that's truth, but shortly after his uncle and a lot of his uncle's friends and some other family, they call came in and I was just like 'Oh, it wasn't the right time.'"

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McGraw then asked Tuiasosopo if he was in love with the Notre Dame All-American.

"As twisted and as confusing as it may be, yeah," Tuiasosopo confessed. "I mean, I cared for this person. I did all that I could to help this person become a better person, even though I wasn't getting anything out of it. Of course it's very shameful and it's very painful to even talk about. Even now it's hard to talk about, but the truth of it is that happened, I grew feelings (and) I grew emotions that I sooner or later couldn't control any more."

"I'm so confused," Tuiasosopo began after McGraw asked him if he is gay. "I'm so lost and I'm just finding me and this whole experience and all these problems are introducing me to myself and everything."

Tuiasosopo did admit that he had feelings for Te'o, but compared his conflicting internal feelings to that of a recovering drug addict.

McGraw played two of the same voicemails "Kekua" left on Te'o's phone that Katie Couric played when she had Te'o on her show last week. He said he was feeling true emotions for Te'o during both calls.

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Tuiasosopo said he made the decision to "kill" Kekua's character after Te'o told "her" he didn't need her. The relationship had become tense in the weeks before her "death" and the death of his grandmother. After Te'o told "her" about the death of his grandmother he also told her he had communicated with at least two ex-girlfriends via Skype. He said it was time for him to move on with his life.

"It hurt me," Tuiasosopo said. "It hit me like a brick wall. I was like 'Whoa, I've given so much into this, and I realized right then in that moment that I poured so much into Lennay, that I myself was getting nothing, and look what I was left with. I was crying that morning. I was hurt."

He then made the decision that he could no longer carry out his Lennay persona.

Te'o thought Kekua died in September, but he received the call from Tuiasosopo on Dec. 6 telling him that Kekua was still alive.

"I felt like even if we ended this and we moved on with our lives and this wasn't brought back up and the truth wasn't known, that we wouldn't truly be moving on," Tuiasosopo said of his rationale for making that December phone call. "It just wasn't...it wasn't the truth. Right then and there I knew I needed to come clean and make everything right."

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Tuiasosopo told McGraw there was never a time that Te'o knew he was being duped.

"Manti, he had no idea," Tuiasosopo said. " Truthfully, honestly he had no involvement. He did not know anything."

Tuiasosopo also admitted to stealing photos of Diane O'Meara from her Facebook account to use them as the face of Kekua.

Tuiasosopo claims he was the voice of Kekua, but he would not recreate it when McGraw asked him to - saying he felt "uncomfortable" doing it. McGraw said he contacted voice analysts from both the FBI and CIA and both reported the odds of Tuiasosopo being the voice on the voicemails is very low.

Tuiasosopo consulted with his family and attorney and later agreed to do the voice behind the veil of a privacy screen. McGraw said that will air during part two of the interview on Friday's show. McGraw concluded Thursday's show by saying Friday's show will reveal the question as

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to "why" Tuiasosopo perpetrated the hoax.