Rotuman Life Experiences
1890–1960
Compiled and edited by
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We dedicate this book to
Elisapeti Kafonika Makarita Inia
(1925–2009)

whose wisdom, generosity, humility, and dedication to the preservation of the Rotuman language and culture was a great gift to all of us who were taught by her and who learned by her example what it means to be Rotuman
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Afterword
Foreword

The inspiration for Rotuman Life Experiences 1890–1960 arose from the process of archiving field notes from my 1960 doctoral research on Rotuma. Reading over my notes and journals from that year brought back vivid memories of my experiences, which in retrospect were quite magical and transformative. I returned from my time on the island a different person with a different set of values. Rotumans had taught me that what mattered most in life was the quality of one’s relationships, and that ambitions that threatened valued relationships were not worth pursuing. I learned to be patient, to cherish a slower pace of life than I had been used to, and to appreciate the moments I spent in the company of others, even when nothing was said or transpired between us. Although it took a little while, I experienced a very real reduction in stress levels as I fell into a routine informed by Rotuman cultural values. Indeed, the only time in my life that I’ve experienced “culture shock” was when I first returned from Rotuma to an urban environment (Suva). I found myself physically shaking while trying to cope with the sheer quantity of information that one is bombarded with requiring quick and decisive action. Needless to say, subsequent technology has accelerated the amount of information one must cope with, but my continued Rotuman research and engagement with the now worldwide Rotuman community have provided a comfortable haven from a world gone mad.

It occurred to me when sorting through my notes from 1960 that although I have written or coauthored some fifty publications about Rotuman culture and the history of the Rotuman people, I have not really endeavoured to convey how life was experienced by Rotumans over the years prior to my visit. It’s not that I lacked the information necessary to
do so. In going through my 1960 field notes I came across 71 life histories, 50 interviews with mothers regarding their child-rearing practices, and responses from 15 school teachers to a questionnaire regarding their teaching methods. These were in addition to less formal accounts conveyed during casual conversations and what I learned by participating in the ongoing life of the community.

The life story accounts were particularly provocative. They were obtained through structured interviews by myself and my two young Rotuman assistants, Amai Sakimi and Rejeli Mejieli, who conducted them in Rotuman and translated them into English. In preparation for publication, they have been edited lightly for spelling, grammar, and clarity, while trying to retain the flavour of Rotuman expressions. While many of the narratives are quite short, consisting of only a page or two, they nevertheless contain remarkably candid expressions of attitudes, emotions, and perceptions experienced during successive life stages. Specifically, the interviews began by asking about memories of early childhood (treatment by parents, relationships with siblings), then school, adolescence (peer relations, courtship), and adult life (marriage, current life circumstances). Because the grant supporting my research from the National Institute for Mental Health concerned grieving, individuals were also asked about their responses to the deaths of significant others.

This work is divided into two parts, which can be read in either order. Part 1 consists of the life story accounts organized by age. The first two chapters in this section include the autobiographies of men and women who were 60 years of age or older at the time of the interview; the following chapters include men and women in their 50s, 40s, 30s, and 20s successively, plus two chapters on people whose birthyears were unknown. The rationale for grouping the life histories by age is that the
older folks experienced Rotuma as it was around the turn of the last century and endured the institutional and cultural changes that took place over the years till 1960, while the younger ones grew up in somewhat different circumstances. To cite just one example, schooling in Rotuma at the beginning of the twentieth century was limited to primary levels, with little opportunity to progress by going abroad, while in post–World War II years not only had secondary education been introduced in Rotuma, but opportunities for advanced education abroad, in places like New Zealand as well as Fiji, were also more readily available.

After considerable thought and consultation with Rotuman colleagues, I was tempted to use the actual names of people based on the assumption that their living descendants would like to know as much as possible about their specific ancestors’ lives despite the possibility that some of the accounts may be a source of embarrassment for a few. On the plus side, I believed that for the great majority of contemporary Rotumans it would enrich their appreciation of their genealogical roots and cultural heritage. However, after further reflection, I decided that even a small risk of causing embarrassment was not worth it. As demonstrated in the custom known as ťē samuga, which involves associating individuals with amusing incidents, Rotumans love to tease one another regarding their ancestors’ foibles and misadventures. While this is mostly done in a light-hearted, good-natured way, the embarrassment can nevertheless be painful sometimes. Therefore, people’s names and many of the specific places they mentioned have been omitted from their accounts, as well as some other information that would have facilitated their identification. Names are, however, provided for the teacher questionnaires.

Part 2 consists of chapters dealing with successive life stages drawn from the life stories. To provide context for these life experiences I include
information regarding social structural variables and customs that provided parameters for experience. As much as possible I have tried to give voice to Rotuman commentators on these matters. So, for example, I rely mainly on the mother interviews for information regarding child-rearing methods, on the teachers’ questionnaires for teaching strategies, and on Elizabeth Inia’s 1998 book Fāeag ‘es Fūaga regarding Rotuman sayings about various aspects of Rotuman culture. Only when necessary do I resort to my own observations and ethnographic accounts of others. Readers who want historical background may decide to read part 2 first; others may choose to plunge into the life stories and explore the context later.

To put my goal in producing this book succinctly, whereas in previously publications I have written about such aspects of Rotuman life as childhood (1970), adolescence (1970, 1998), leadership (1996, 1997), and reactions to death (1965), those publications have been primarily from the standpoint of cultural norms, with minimal attention to variations among individuals.3 This book, in contrast, is concerned primarily with intracultural variability—with how individual Rotumans responded to the challenges posed by the particular circumstances confronting them as they lived their lives during the period between 1890 and 1960. Data from my 1960 island-wide census and the 1903–1960 registry information that I collected and collated regarding births, deaths, and marriages provide a broader view of variations in such matters as household size, marriage patterns, and residential histories.

This work has been edited by my wife, Jan Rensel, who has also conducted research on Rotuma and within Rotuman communities around the world since 1987. Thus while I refer in the text to myself in the first
person singular as “I” or “my,” the words “we” and “our” refer to Jan and me together.

**Note regarding Translation of Rotuman Terms**

Before turning to the life stories, it is necessary to address some translation issues, starting with the words that have been glossed here as “love” and “hate.” The Rotuman term *hanisi*, which is generally translated as “love,” refers less to an inferred emotional state than to a supportive pattern of behaviour. In this cultural context, kind and generous actions are the measures of love rather than the degree to which emotions of affection are expressed. So, as we shall see, statements about love in the life stories are frequently followed by descriptions of material support, of the loving person providing for someone’s necessities and wants in a consistent manner. *Hanisi* can also be used to convey compassion, reflecting empathy for someone’s suffering, and is translated in relevant contexts as feeling “sorry for” or “pity for” someone.

The word “hate” in the life stories will likely seem too strong and dramatic for some of the circumstances in which it appears, as for example when people report that a member of the opposite sex in whom they were interested “hated” them. The problem here is that the Rotuman word *fesi’a*, which usually gets translated as “hate,” covers a much wider range of emotions, from mild dislike to extremely strong antagonism. More often than not in the life story narratives when the word “hate” is used, it seems more appropriate to regard it as referring to such behaviours as avoidance, making derogatory comments or jokes, or unwelcome teasing. Rarely in the Rotuman culture of this timeframe did anyone commit acts of violence like those that we associate with hatred in the West. On Rotuma, the usual way of dealing with relationships that had soured was by avoidance,
including moving away when tensions became too disruptive to daily life. Likewise, the Rotuman terms *feke* and *rehu* are often glossed as “angry” or “wild.” But these words, like *fesi‘a*, can cover a broad spectrum of meanings, ranging from mild dissatisfaction, to exasperation, to rage. Because we have no basis for inferring degrees of discontent from the narratives, we have left the terms as originally translated by my Rotuman assistants, but we urge readers to be aware of nuances that may be embedded in these expressions.

When transcribing the original interview texts in English, my Rotuman assistants generally translated the Rotuman word *haharagi* as “young boy” or “young girl.” The problem here is that the term refers to a life stage that does not have an exact counterpart in English. Thus, Churchward’s 1940 Rotuman dictionary defines *haharagi* as “young, youthful, adolescent; unmarried, single” (as well as “fat, stout, plump, in good physical condition”). In practice, the term is used to describe a life stage defined by a role that involves participating in household and communal work activities by unmarried persons, at least into their early 20s. Thus schoolchildren, regardless of their age, are not yet *haharagi*. We have chosen to use the terms “youth,” “adolescent,” “young man,” or “young woman” as translations in most contexts.

When speaking about courtship, men often referred to the process of learning to “joke with,” “talk to,” or “become friends with” girls in whom they were interested. In the context of courtship, these phrases can be euphemisms for flirting or engaging in intimacy, given the surreptitious nature of the process.
Notes to Foreword

1 Ages of life story tellers are based on colonial registry data for births and marriages and, in some instances, on self reports from an island-wide census that I conducted in 1960. The birth registers I was able to copy range from 1903 through 1960. All self-reported data, including age at marriage, are treated as estimates. I was unable to determine the ages of a few individuals; their stories appear in chapters 11 and 12.

2 Numerous Rotuman sayings are quoted in part 2, drawn from Fāeag ‘es Fūaga: Rotuman Proverbs, compiled and translated by Elizabeth Kafoniaka Makarita Inia (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1998).


4 The Reverend C. Maxwell Churchward’s 1940 Rotuman Grammar and Dictionary has long been out of print, but its dictionary section was republished in 1998 as A New Rotuman Dictionary with an English–Rotuman wordlist by Elizabeth K. Inia, Sofie Arntsen, Hans Schmidt, Jan Rensel,
and Alan Howard (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific).

Part 1

Life Stories from Rotuma
Chapter 1

Men Born before 1900

(Age about 70)

I was the only son of my dear parents. I was brought up by my uncle and aunt. I called them this because I was not related to them; they were just my parents’ friends and I was adopted by this couple, who were childless. As far back as I can remember, this uncle and aunt were very kind to me. They brought me up as if I were their own child. They always brought me whatever they knew would suit me. Never once did I cry for anything. My clothes and everything were always ready for me to use.

My auntie taught me how to act towards the elders in the villages, and what to do to become a real good man. She encouraged me to grow up to become a strong, brave man. Nevertheless, I was a very cheeky boy among my friends, and their parents hated to see me going with their children.

School was the last thing for me to think of. I told my uncle that I didn’t feel like going to school, but since it was by force I had to go. At that time when a child reached Class 5, which I did, everybody said that he or she was an intelligent child. I had to leave school because that’s as far as we could go in Rotuma, and I came home to work hard because we were growing up to become young men. I helped my uncle and whatever he told me to do, I always did. At that time we never saw a lorry or car or bicycle, and when we boys wished to roam around the island to other villages we had to go on horseback. I loved riding horses, so everywhere I went, even to the bush, I rode horseback.
One day I told my uncle about a girl I met and loved but wondered if she would love me in return. I wanted her to be my wife but hadn’t gotten a chance to meet her. My uncle then went to the girl’s parents, and since he was a man of good reputation the girl’s parents gave their consent. I felt very excited and it was so different to think of married life, which was soon upon me. I waited and then my dream came true. I got married to this girl and we lived in my home with my uncle and aunt. I worked very hard then because I knew I was going to have a big family and because I was living with my uncle and not my parents. He always told me to be kind to my wife and that I should treat her the way he had treated me.

After a few years my uncle died during a sudden sickness. I felt so sorry because I wished him to live longer so that I could have the chance to return to him his kindness to me, beginning from the time I was small until then. Since he had no children or any brother or sister he left all his things and his house to me. I was very lucky to get all these things. My wife and I have been together for many years and we had many children. I worked very hard and tried all possible ways to earn a living and send them to school. My oldest son studied hard and is now working in the agricultural department. Another is an assistant medical practitioner, and my four daughters are all married.

Now my wife and I are getting old. Only my daughters are helping me now, working in the plantations, cutting copra, and looking after the cows and pigs. Most days I have to stay in the house with only one of my daughters helping me. I feel sorry for her because she is a girl, and I wish I could be strong again like before so that I could look after all of us.

A few years ago I got seriously ill and was dreadfully worried about my daughter because she had to do all the work for me. When I got well
again I was as deaf as one could imagine. I couldn’t hear the slightest sound, and I couldn’t go anywhere without someone with me. When someone wished to speak to me he or she had to come and touch me so I would know someone wanted me.

Now I can hear again and it feels like I was dead and came back to life. It made me feel strange, but I began to work and help my daughter. I’m now old, but healthy and strong enough to work in my plantations and afford my family, with the help of my dear daughter, with whatever they need.
(Age about 65)

There were only two children in our family, my brother and I, and I was the younger. We lived with our parents in a native-style house, so we knew our parents were poor. I wasn’t sure whether they were really poor or whether our father was a bit lazy. I can remember that when we were small my brother and I used to roam around the village. When we woke up in the morning we just went out, and many times we went without food, but our mother never looked for us. Sometimes we came back in the afternoon, had a little bit to eat, and then went off again, sometimes not coming back until late in the evening. Then we had our supper and went to sleep. Sometimes I pretended to be sleeping and overheard my parents quarrelling about us—that we roamed around too much. But my father would say that we could go anywhere we wanted and nothing would happen to us because we were boys. I knew my father took no notice of us, going anywhere he wanted without paying attention to us, so as soon as I awoke each day I went out looking for my friends to begin playing.

I acted this way until I reached school age, but in those days schools were not by force like nowadays, so most of the days in the week I stayed home. I didn’t feel like going to school. I preferred to roam around with my friends. My parents never forced me to go to school, so when I was about twelve years old I stayed home for good and by then I began to go with my father and work on his plantations. I tried my best and hoped that I could learn to work hard, so that one day I might be able to supply our family with food so that my father could stay home and take a rest and do whatever he wished.

My dreams came true, and after two years my father left all his plantations to me since I was more trustworthy than my elder brother. My father stayed home and did as he wished, and I looked after our
plantations. Many people used to ask me why I was planting while my father was staying home like an old lady and I just answered that it was because I wanted him to have a rest. It was just because I hated school so much that I was determined to do my best on the plantations. At that time I realised that my parents really loved me. Whatever they got in the house they always put aside for me.

I went out every evening with my friends in the neighbourhood. We went from village to village seeking our own pleasure. Many nights we didn’t come back home until the morning to sleep. During that time I happened to meet a young woman who lived in another district and we started to see each other, but I heard that her parents didn’t like me. Then one night I went to her and brought her to my home. We got married and stayed in my home. Her relatives really hated the idea because of our different religions, but we didn’t care. We stayed together for many years, until her death in 1952.

My mother died a few years after our wedding. My wife and I really loved her. She was a kind woman to everybody and I found out that she had lived a rough life with my father. After she was dead my father spoke about her and told us of his rough ways towards her—what a sad life she had had with such a rough husband.

We had several children and I felt a bit worried about them, because children are not easy to bring up. I worked very hard to earn money to supply them with their wants. I sent them to school, but they all left without reaching the higher classes. They all married except my youngest son, who is living with us and taking good care of us. My father is still living, and I wish my mother were still alive, too, so that I could look after them as best I can.
(Age about 64)

I was the second eldest in a family of four children. I had two brothers and one sister; my sister was the youngest of us. We lived with my parents in my mother’s home. I can remember that my parents worked very hard to support us with all we needed. They used to tell us which things were good and which were bad. They would punish us if we did something that we already knew was wrong. But they were always kind to us and I remember that sometimes I was naughty but they just scolded me and that was all. But I also remember that I was the black sheep of the family and whatever happened in our home I got blamed for it.

My elder brother started going to school, and after two years I went with him. School seemed to be too hard for me and most of the time I just sat down doing nothing but making strange noises to attract the others’ attention. I never found any pleasure in learning and it was very seldom that I ever spent a day in school without being punished for playing in class. My parents always told me not to disobey my teacher, but since they did not see me I did as I pleased. I acted this way until I was 16 years old when I was told to leave school, because I had only reached Class 4.

I came home and helped my father and brother work on their plantations. I tried my very best to help them and show them that I could be a good farmer, so that one day my father could stay at home and I would be able to support our family with food.

I began to make friends with the adolescent boys in our village and every evening we went out for walks to other villages looking for fun. We met many adolescent boys and girls and played together with them and usually didn’t return home until late at night. Finally I met a woman who attracted my attention and after seeing her for quite some time I told my
parents about her. My father told me to wait for a while, but I was very eager to get married to her and didn’t want to delay. This woman already had a daughter, but of all the girls I had met she was the only one that I loved, so I wanted her to be my wife. After six months my dreams came true—I got married to her and I went to live in her home. She was a kind woman, and after I had stayed for a week at her family’s home I told her that I would like her to come with me to my parents, so she could look after my parents and me. She agreed and we went to my house, and my parents were very happy. They were so glad to see us they could hardly express their delight. My wife took good care of them, since they were old and couldn’t do their work properly like they could when they were strong.

After we had had seven children my father died. How sad I felt to think of him. My mother had died somewhat before him, so I didn’t have a parent left to look at. Then there were only us three brothers with our wives, and our sister with her husband, and our children, but our parents had died and we wouldn’t ever see them again.

Then one time I was ordered to go to Makogai [a leper colony in Fiji] because of one of my toes. I had something like an abscess on one of my toes and the doctor advised me to go. I was on Makogai for about two years, and I can’t express how glad I was to return home again. My children had been taking care of their mother and when I returned she told me all about how kind they had been to her.

I got back to work on my plantations and my eldest sons helped me. I was pleased to see them working hard and doing their very best to help me in every way they could. My eldest son went on a trip to Fiji for a while, but the rest stayed home. Soon after that my eldest daughter got married and went to live in her husband’s home.
Then a great sorrow came into my life. Two of my sons were killed in the bomb explosion at Juju. No one can imagine the sadness that I felt, losing two sons at one time. I nearly lost my mind because of the great loss that befell me.

Now my wife and I are old and there is only one of my daughters and her children taking care of us. Most of the days I have to stay in bed, and only my grandsons are supplying us with food. I can see that they are doing their best, but it is so pitiful for me to watch them working so hard to supply our whole family with our needs.

I loved all my children, but I think my twin sons were the closest to me. One of them died when he was about six years old, and the other just died at the beginning of this year. I really felt very sad when he died because he was working very hard with my grandsons to help me, and I felt at ease when I stayed at home, because I knew I could trust him with his nephews in the bush.

Now I am very weak and in ill health, so that only my grandsons are left to supply our family with what we need.
(Age about 64)

There were many of us in our family but we had different fathers. I was the oldest, with a father of my own. I was brought up by my mother and stepfather who loved me very much. They used to tell me good and bad things that they wanted me to know and to do what was good and to stay away from bad things.

My parents sent me to school which I loved and studied hard and had good results every year. I was promoted each year until I had a chance to go to Fiji for further studies. Subjects were harder there and I could not get through the exams, so I came home.

Because I just came from Fiji, and being an adolescent boy, I thought every adolescent girl’s eyes fixed on me whenever I walked on the road. I roamed and was looking for a young woman at the same time to be my wife. The day came and my dream came true when I met a nice young woman and got married to her. We stayed in her home for a few months and then came to my home where we stayed for many, many years.

I was later chosen to take over a whole district and the people all gave their agreement and I ruled over them. Older people were like children sometimes; they were so naughty that I had to speak to them like children. I made them do my work, like cutting copra or anything I would like them to do for me.

My wife and I had many children and when the older children had gone to school there were only three daughters staying with their mother at home. My wife did her very best and the women in the district all loved her and whatever she would call for, they were ready to help. But for my part, whenever I called my men to do my work, only a few came out of more than a hundred who belonged to my district. My people built me a house and cut copra for me and yet they were not satisfied with what I had
done for them. One day I got a letter from the government that I had to leave my position to another man. I felt so sorry because whenever I wanted hard work done for me they would come and finish it in a short while, but now I would have to do the work on my own. I can remember that many people were very glad when I was told to leave off ruling them.

A few years later my wife unluckily died, leaving all our children for me to care for. I felt so strange and very sad about her death because there wasn’t anyone wiser to look after my children except my oldest daughter who had to leave school and stay home to do the work, like cleaning the yard and washing the clothes. I always thought of my wife when I saw my daughter taking her place at home. She cared for the tiny ones just like her mother used to do, and she knew very well how to cook their food and to give them what they wanted. I did my very best to support them and provide whatever they needed and tried to let them forget their mother, who seemed so dear to all of them. It took a long time for us to forget the sight of her.

Many years later I was called to a village in Fiji to be their catechist, so I went with the rest of my children who were not married yet. We spent three years among the Fijians and two of my daughters married Fijian men. When I came back to Rotuma I had to leave them in their husbands’ homes. I came back with my youngest daughter to take care of me. She was soon married and went to live with her husband, so I was left lonely with the people in the neighbourhood to care for my home.

As I grew older I thought of getting married again and my dreams came true when I married a woman from another district. We lived in my house and unluckily I was told to retire from my situation—to leave my place and to find another place for me to live. My wife and I went over to my brother-in-law, but they didn’t like us to live with them in the same
house, so we went to my wife’s sons’ land that they had bought. Maybe her sons didn’t like me, and two of them went to Fiji, leaving the youngest son and daughter with us. I wondered why my second wife’s relations didn’t like me. I suppose I seemed cheeky in appearance to them. My wife and I have stayed together now for about eight years, but we haven’t had a child because we are both old. I was often sick with headaches and the doctor told me it was my teeth that caused it. So he told me to take out all my teeth, which I did a few months ago, and I went to Fiji and had two sets of false teeth made and came back on the last boat.

Now I’m very old, with all white hair covering my head. I’m staying with my wife in her home and doing my best to care for her and her daughter. The son is out of school and is a big helper to me. He is doing what he can and I am pleasing myself, just doing what I wish to do every day.
There were only two children in our family, myself and my younger sister. I can remember that our parents always treated us kindly when we were young. They didn’t lecture us all the time. Sometimes we went and played with the neighbouring children and sometimes they would come to our house. When they would come to our house, my mother would prepare things for us to play with.

They sent me to school when I reached the age of 6, but at that time school attendance was not compulsory so I stayed at home most of the time. When I did go to school I never paid any attention to the teacher. I wouldn’t ever sit still and always made noises and did things to attract the others’ attention in the class. I acted like that all the way through school, until I was promoted to Class 4. But I had advanced slowly and by then I was older than the rest of the children, and it was too late for me to start studying seriously. I left school when I was 14 years old, but I was still in the baby classes.

After that I began to help my father in his plantations. After coming back in the evening I would often talk with my friends about the work and the things I had been doing. My friends began to praise me and that caused me to work more eagerly. I wanted others to praise me, so I worked hard. Many times I took my friends up to my father’s plantations and showed off my work.

My friends and I used to take evening strolls to other villages, looking for fun with the adolescent boys and girls of other places. It happened one time that I met a girl and we fell in love with each other, so I came home and told my parents. But because we were of different religions my parents did not want me to marry this girl. I was very
stubborn and wanted my wish to come true, so I forced my parents to give their agreement. They did and we got married.

We went to live in her home, and I found it hard to take care of such a big family. I wanted to be at my wife’s side all the time and not have to work so hard. I spent most of my free time with my wife, but her relations seemed to hate me. Soon my wife had a baby daughter, but by that time I had had enough of her relatives, so I left my wife, without quarrelling, and went back home. People laughed at me and said that I ran away from my wife because I was too lazy, but I didn’t care about what the people said—I just couldn’t face my wife’s relations any more, so I didn’t go back to her.

I began to go out in the evening again, just like the adolescent boys, and I never thought again of my wife and baby. The youth in the district despised me, but whenever I knew they had gathered together somewhere I went to join them; most of the time I hadn’t even taken a bath, but I went with them anyway.

After a few years I met a young woman whom I fell in love with, and I found every way I possibly could to see her. She loved me too, and she told me that it didn’t make any difference what her parents would say—that she would marry me if I wanted her to. I came and told my father—by then my mother was dead—and he told me to find someone to go and speak with the girl’s family. My uncle did so for me, and after I got a divorce I got married to my second wife.

I went to live at my wife’s home, but for some reason the people of her village didn’t seem to like me. My wife wanted me to enter religious life so I became a catechist in our Methodist church, and we moved from village to village, as is the custom with catechists in Rotuma. We would stay three years in a village and then transfer to another one.
My wife and I remained together and have had six children—five boys and one girl. We have done our best to give them everything they needed. I love all of them but I think both of us, my wife and I, love our daughter more than our five sons. That is because in our custom boys grow up and are able to take care of themselves, but when girls grow up they are unable to supply themselves with what they need because we have to cut copra to earn money for our living. Since she was our only daughter we have always done our best to give her whatever she would ask for.

A few years ago I came to this district with my wife and children and I don’t know when I’ll be moved to another locality. All of my children have finished school, but none of them have received any advanced education.

Now I am getting old—I’m more than 60 now—and my two youngest sons and my daughter are taking care of us. I can still work on the plantations and help them in light work, but not like before when I was strong and healthy.
There were only two of us in our family—myself and my older sister. Our parents were good people, but they were poor. They did their best to supply us with everything that we needed. I know they were kind, because whenever we wanted something, and they were unable to get it at the time, my mother would tell us to wait, and eventually my father would get it for us. Our parents never went anywhere without taking us along. We always heard kind words from them, and I remember my mother telling us to grow up to love each other and not to fight, especially since we would each have children of our own one day.

Their kindness and affection seemed to spoil us. Sometimes we were good, but sometimes we were naughty; in school I was lazy and never paid much attention to the teacher. I only wanted to do what was easy for me and found no pleasure in any labour. When I was about 10 years old, my parents seemed to get tired of the way I was behaving in school and sent me to a boarding school, where I was put under the care of a very strict master. He was harsh looking and I didn't like him. Every day he would stalk among us, and unless a lad chose to attend well to his book, he had no chance for a single quiet moment. This would never do for me, so one day I left school and went home to my dear parents. I told them that I would not return to the boarding school again. After that I never went to school again but stayed home and helped my father with his plantations. I spent day after day in the bush helping him and trying my very best, so that one day I would be able to work as well as my father did then.

With some of the boys from the neighbourhood I used to go out in the evening and roam around the village. We went to the shows and dances and enjoyed ourselves. After that we would come home to sleep. It happened one day that I met a nice-looking woman whom I wanted to
marry if my parents would agree to it. I knew that this woman had been married before, and that her husband had died. I tried different ways, but I couldn’t have a chance to speak to this woman, and then I told my parents about it, but because we were of different religions, my parents told me to look forward to the future and I might meet a young woman who was of the same religion as myself. But I felt that I had to marry this woman. She might be kinder to me than a younger one. I waited, but my parents wouldn’t change their mind, so I left them and went to this woman’s home. We got married in her religion but later I went back to my old church. We had two sons and one belonged to my church while the other has the same religion as his mother. My parents didn’t like this kind of family—having two religions with the sons divided, but as long as my wife agreed to it, that was enough.

My parents were old and soon they died, one after the other. I felt very sorry for them because I knew that they had had a rough time with me. Now that I had two children of my own, I knew how hard it was to raise children and manage a family. They always tried to find out what my sister and I needed. Now they are taking their long rest while it’s my turn to take care of my two sons.

My sons grew up and became young men and afterwards got married. The elder son and his wife are living with me, and the younger one is living with his wife at his wife’s home. Now my wife is weak and has to walk with the help of a stick, while unluckily I have become blind, and now both of us have to stay in the house waiting for our son and his wife to give us food and water and anything that we need. I feel pity for my son, being that I’m not very old and am a blind man and cannot give him any help. What a thing to happen! It would be better for me to die than to stay
like this, without any hope of seeing the glittering of the stars or the rays of the sun anymore.
(Age over 60)

When I was very young I asked my mother about our family and she told me that my father and two elder brothers had died in the epidemic of dysentery. There were just the two of us left living, and her brothers looked after us, giving us food and everything we needed. She was very kind to me and every time we were together she always told me to be a good son to her, and that when I grew up I should be good to all my friends, and especially to her.

At that time school attendance was not required like today, and so I have never seen the inside of a schoolhouse. When I was about 10 years old, my mother told me to go with my uncle to work on his plantations. I went every day and my uncle taught me how to plant food and he began to share with me from his own garden, but he still looked after my work until he knew I could supply my mother’s needs. I always remembered my mother’s words—not to be a bad boy or I might grow up to be a bad man. She was the only parent I had to bring me up and give me advice. So each time I came across a company of bad boys, I always went away from them.

My mother became very ill one day with pneumonia and died after a week. To tell the truth I couldn’t resist crying aloud as if I were a woman. I had been trying my very best to work so that one day we might make a family of our own. I felt as if I wouldn’t feel like working again. How sad to think of her and to picture the unhappy days when she was carrying me in her arms, and to think of her bringing me up without someone to help her, and the way she used to tell me to stay out of bad company and to try to grow up to be a kind person to my neighbours. Even if I were to fulfil all her wishes, she wouldn’t be there to see it.

I was living with my uncle and one day I met an adolescent girl whom I thought I loved. I went and talked to her and after a short while
we became friends. My love for her began to touch my nerves so one day I
told my uncle about it. He laughed at me and told me to wait for a while
because I was only 17 and much too young to get married. I told my
girlfriend and she didn’t want to wait because she said I might change my
mind and leave her. I told her to wait until my uncle thought it to be the
right time for us to marry. But knowing that my uncle didn’t like that girl,
I went *fa'ua* to her home and stayed with her. My uncle was very angry with
me, but what could he do—I was already in the girl’s home. I went one
day to tell him I was sorry and he told me everything about that girl’s
family, but I loved the girl and couldn’t leave her. He told me that one day
I would change my mind and would run away from my wife. I never
suspected his words to be true, but they did come true. We stayed together
for two years and had only one daughter when I had a row with my wife’s
parents and I went back home to my uncle. I stayed with him and my five
cousins for many years. After four of my cousins were married, I lived with
the youngest one.

My daughter grew up to be a young woman and one time she got
angry at her mother and came to me. My cousin and his wife and children
had gone to Fiji and my daughter and I were left alone to manage the
family. My daughter got married and had a daughter, but unluckily her
husband died, leaving his child of only 3 years old, and now my daughter
has another husband and we are living in the same house. Now I am over
60, but never once do I ever think of getting married again.
(Age about 60)

I was the eldest in a family of four children. There were two boys and two girls. The youngest of us was a brother who died, leaving myself with my two sisters. As far back as I can remember we were kindly treated by our parents, from the time we were small until we became adolescents. They were very kind and whatever we would ask for they always presented us. Mother always used kind words, and besides school subjects she loved to talk about politeness and customs whenever she had the chance to speak to us.

At that time there wasn’t a school in our village, but Mother always talked to us and we were like children who went to school every day.

My parents were of a good family but very poor, and I know they had a hard time trying to get us everything we asked for from them. They worked hard to earn our living but since we were children we never noticed how difficult it was for our parents to meet our needs, and I thought it was very easy for them to work for us. I grew up and I began to help my father in his plantations. Then I began to notice that my father was a hard-working man. He perspired day after day to supply the family with food and cut copra to earn money for Mother and the children.

I became an adolescent and mixed with other boys. We began to wander every night to villages near our district. I met an adolescent girl whom I seemed to love most but when my parents knew about it they gave me a good scolding because they didn’t like the girl, so I had to stay away from her. Then I met another one, but my parents didn’t like her just the same. Words that came from these two girls’ relations made them very angry. I loved these two girls because when we met each other and I knew I was the one who spoke to them first. I thought that we could make up a
good family, but my parents didn’t like them so I had to find a way to stay away from them.

One evening my parents told me that they had found a young woman and already spoke to her parents about her becoming my wife. They told me her name and I was so glad to hear about her because she was one of the girls who hated me to come near her whenever the adolescent boys and girls mixed together. I loved her, of course, but never got a chance to get near her. We made our engagement and after a few months we got married. Everything was easy because of our parents. During the first week after our wedding this young woman still hated me and her parents had to speak to her. I tried my very best to speak to her too, and to show my kindness, and later on we stayed nicely together as if there wasn’t anything that happened before. She began to do our work nicely and lead our family as she wished to.

We were staying in my wife’s home, and after many years we had out first two children, a boy and a girl. The girl was younger. At that time there was a choice in the village for a new chief. To my surprise, I was elected chief, but how should I lead my people? I felt so strange and nervous to sit in front of so many people, old and young and children. How was I to speak to them? I knew that being the chief I was their servant at the same time. I took my place and my wife, being a nice woman, seemingly was liked by everybody. At the beginning my father was helping me know how I should act to make the people like me. Unluckily, my dear father died two years after my election, leaving me alone to lead my people.

My poor wife was then taken seriously ill and died and my children (five of them) only had me to look after them. How sad I was to lose two people at the same time. My mother was then old and feeble and couldn’t
care for the children properly. For a whole year I was leading the people alone with my sister taking my wife’s place.

I then got married again and how different I found the people that time. People seemed to hate my new wife and began to disobey my words. This woman was also hated by my own children and then I noticed that she was not as nice as my first wife; there was really a great difference.

Now we have stayed for many years without a child, but since she’s my wife I love her, and although many times people told me she is not the chief, she is my wife and she may have something to say, too. I noticed that people really hated me because of my wife. Many of them grumbled and said that they should have someone new in my place because I wasn’t doing the right thing sometimes, but none of them had the courage to let it be known in a district meeting. Sometimes I knew I was doing wrong because my wife liked to be that way, but the two of us were on the same side. My wife sometimes made my people hate me but I didn’t care about them, I cared about my wife, the one who would take care of me.

I’m still a chief in our district and looking after my people, many of whom like me while many hate me because I am getting old and now not well fitted for this kind of work.
(Age about 60)

I was the third youngest in a family of seven children. We were living with our parents at home. When I came of age to realise it, I can remember that my elder brothers and sisters were helping our parents whenever they had time. My parents were of a high-status family in this district and we grew up with all the good advice they could give to us. My parents worked hard in order to afford us with whatever we needed.

They sent us to school, and out of the seven of us I was the only one who kept getting promoted. At that time the highest class in Rotuma was Class 5. I went up to Class 5 and was very proud of myself, and so were my parents. They sent me over to Fiji, hoping that I would get an overseas education, but since I was an adolescent boy of about 14 years of age I began to get lazy in my studies. So after two years in boarding school I left school and looked for a job to be able to supply my needs. I wanted to be a carpenter and I was fortunate enough to get a job as an apprentice.

When I knew a little bit of it, after practicing for a few years, I came back home. I found that my brothers and sisters had all married except for two of them, and had left home. One of my sisters had died after a short illness, while the youngest one was in nursing school, so I was left alone with my parents. Because I had just returned from Fiji, I dressed myself as a European, and this made me very proud of myself. I saw with my own eyes that most of the young ladies paid attention to me whenever I would parade up and down the road in the evenings. I made friends with other adolescent boys and went out in the evenings to other districts and found much pleasure among the adolescent boys and girls. People seemed to adore me. I couldn’t tell whether it was because I was from a high-status family, or whether it was because I was just new, or maybe I was more
handsome than my friends. I took my chances with the young women and flattered many of them.

Finally I happened to meet a woman with a son of her own, and I was very much attracted to her. I told my parents that I would like her to be my wife. Instead of talking to her, I wrote a love letter that she answered, telling me that she loved me no matter what would happen later on. We took a chance and met each other every night we could and planned for our future. My elder brothers and sisters didn’t want me to marry this woman, for they said that I was the only one left, and that I should look for an adolescent girl so that they could have a big wedding—calling all our relatives on the island to be present on my wedding day. But I wouldn’t change my mind because I already loved this woman and had told her that I would take care of her and her child no matter what my parents would say.

My dreams came true and we did get married, but my relatives did not come to see my wife on that day. The words that my sisters said to my wife were not nice or kind to her, but I told her not to pay attention to them. I told her just to listen to me, for I would be the one who would take care of her. My dear wife had a rough time with my people in the beginning, but she took no notice of them. We had our first child, but still my sisters hated my wife. My relatives were also very angry with me, just because they didn’t like the woman I had married. They all went to their homes and stayed there, leaving me and my wife to look after my parents. My wife was so nice and kind to my parents that after a few years they fully accepted her and we made a happy family.

It is so pitiful to think of my mother, who died after a sudden illness, leaving only my father, who was already weak, to stay in the house and play with his grandsons. We stayed for many years and had seven sons
without a daughter, before my wife died. I felt so bad when my wife died that I felt sick for a few days after the funeral. I was sad and miserable during that time. I did my best for my sons and sent them to Fiji for further education, but only the two youngest came out with good results. When they left school they received higher wages in their employment. Five of my sons have married, one has died, and the youngest of them is still roaming. I did my very best when they were young so that they would grow up kind-hearted and be nice to everybody—young or old—whomever they would meet.

Now I am old and whenever I feel sick I always think of my wife, because we haven’t got a daughter, and in spite of her weakness in her later years, she always did her best to stay with me and she would sometimes massage the sore parts of my body. Now I’m staying home with my two sons and their wives. I’m unable to help them in any kind of work because I’m very old and feel sick very often, and because of that I stay in the house like an old woman.
Chapter 2  
Women Born before 1900

(Age about 66)

When I was a small girl I lived together with my mother and father and brothers. My mother died when I was 8 years old. I thought of my mother for a whole year after she died. Every time I used to wash my father’s and brothers’ clothes or do other things she used to do, I would think of her. I never did those things when she was alive. My brothers and father were very good to me; they let me do whatever I liked because I was the only girl. I was really happy at that time. I really loved my brothers because they always gave me anything I wanted. They used to take me to every kind of thing they used to go to—dances, makrotuam, tika matches. They used to take me on the horse. There were no cars at that time.

One time, when I was an adolescent, I met a young man and he asked me to marry him. I told this to my brothers, and they told me that I should marry him because he really loved me and would make a good husband for me. I married him, but it only lasted for three years because his way was not good. He didn’t treat me as well as my brothers did. I left my husband and went back to my father and brothers. My father told me that I should look for a man because one day my brothers would marry and he would die, and there would be no one to look after me. So I tried to look for another husband, and not long after I met my present husband, we got married.

Soon after I got married my father died, when I was about 30 years old. For four months after my father died I thought I was going to die too. I was always thinking of him, and no matter what my husband did to
make me happy I still felt sad. It wasn’t until about two years after that that I started to forget it. Still I didn’t like being married as much as when I was with my brothers and my father. After I had my first child sometimes my husband didn’t act so good to me, and I would cry and think of the time when I was living with my father and brothers. It wasn’t until after I had four children that I finally forgot all about my father and brothers; then I only thought about my children.
(Age about 64)

I was the only daughter in my family and never once was I ever parted from my parents when I was a young child. As far back as I can remember my parents were not very rich, but they had enough to afford me with whatever my mouth could whisper to them. Sometimes I overheard them saying that they should try their very best to give me whatever I wanted because I was their only child. I stayed with my mother every day, and when she would tell me to do some work for her I would usually do it, but if I was in a bad mood she could say a hundred things and I wouldn’t do it. I became very cheeky and sometimes I noticed that they looked angry, but I wasn’t frightened of them. At that time there wasn’t any school and my parents used to teach me some of the manners which I should copy while growing up. They taught me how to be a real native woman, and it wasn’t difficult to follow because all the neighbourhood children were so nice and polite in their manners, so my parents didn’t object when I went and played with them. Children would sometimes come home to play with my toys and my sina [tiny little dolls made up of cloth]. I was lucky to have many children to play with me every day, because I was an only child.

One day, when I was already a teenager, my mother took me with her to a feast held in another village and we stayed with her sister for two days. I was a stranger there. There were many children around but I didn’t know them, and of course, I didn’t feel at home. I told my mother that I would like it better if we would return home, but she just said to wait until the feast was over. We came home that evening and I never thought of going back again to that place.

When I grew up and became an adolescent, I made friends with my neighbours, and whenever they wanted to go somewhere we always went together. That time all the adolescent girls were under the care of the
chief’s sister. We had formed a club and practiced our native dances, and we went dancing around the island, competing with other clubs. My parents always told me to stay quiet when I joined the others to go any place. I met many people when we went dancing in different places and became familiar with the different ways of people, but both the old people and young people were as nice and polite as could be. They always gave us a warm welcome whenever we came to their places to dance.

It happened that I met an adolescent boy with whom I fell in love. He spoke to me, but I didn’t want to take a chance, and I just told him that my parents were at home. He seemed to have the same feeling for me as I did for him, so his father came to my parents one night and they spoke about us. My parents were surprised because I never told them about that boy. They asked me about it and I just gave them my agreement and they sent words of contentment to the boy’s parents, and after a few months we got married.

It made me feel strange and ashamed in the beginning, because I wasn’t used to it—as though I had done something very wrong. We stayed in my home and looked after my parents, who had by that time become old and feeble. My husband was a kind man to us. Whenever I asked him to do things for my parents he did, but unluckily my dear father died a year after our wedding. I felt very sorry for him, and this caused me to stay for two whole days without food just because of my sadness. How could I return all the kindness he had shown to me? Only my dear mother was left, and this was not enough—I wished they were both alive.

I had two daughters and we have done our best so that they wouldn’t cry for anything. They were our only daughters and my husband worked very hard and brought fruits and food—anything they would ask him for. We sent them to school, but I couldn’t tell whether they had done
their best or not. Sometimes I helped my husband cut copra, because this was the only means to get money, and whatever my daughters wanted in the store we always had to get for them. I brought them up and taught them everything my parents had taught me when I was small. My elder daughter left school and got married to a young man in the village. They had only three children when my daughter died. You can imagine how sad I was. I fainted many times and I felt like I could lose my mind whenever my thoughts would turn to my daughter.

By now my younger daughter had a husband and I am living with them and my grandchildren (elder daughter’s children). My son-in-law is a very kind man. He works very hard every day since my husband and I are very old and feeble and we are treated like children. But he takes good care of us—like we were his own parents. He does everything we want him to do for us. The only thing I can do now is to look after the children when they are asleep, but I am unable to do any hard work, just sleep and eat like other children do.
(Age about 64)

There were ten of us in our family and I was the youngest. We were all alive and brought up by our parents. The eight eldest were boys and the two youngest were girls. I can remember that nearly all the families in the district were my parents’ friends. I don’t know if it was because my parents were kind, or because they were richer than the rest of them. There were no schools at that time and only our parents taught us how to work and to behave ourselves. As each of us grew up we helped our mother and father, and when my elder brothers became young men, they all went to work in the bush so my father could have a rest, because his sons worked as well as he wished them to. The people from the village always spoke highly about my brothers because not very many of the youth worked as well as them. Most adolescent boys were hard to lead in the proper native customs but my brothers were not of that sort. My sister and I helped our mother, but I had a bad leg and was the pet of the family. I wasn’t strong enough to help my mother properly and yet I did all my best to do what I could for her. My parents loved me as if I were a child and everything I would ask for was always given to me. My brothers got married one by one and all went to their wives’ homes. Then my sister got married and went to her husband’s place and only my parents and I were left at our home. They used to tell me that if their wishes were fulfilled they would live long enough to take care of me throughout my life, but unfortunately death comes upon everybody, no matter how poor or rich or weak or strong.

I was an adolescent when my mother died and I felt very sad because I knew that my father was older and very soon I would be alone. There was no other woman to be seen at home to be like my mother. How dear I was to her and how she always taught me to do this and that. For weeks and months tears always came down whenever I stayed idle and
thought of her, or whenever my father and I spoke and came upon her name. What a pity to see me, a lame person, taking care of my old father. Only a year passed and my dear father died and left me lonely and forlorn. How could anybody imagine the sadness which came upon me. I wondered if I could stay with any of my brothers or sisters. They did love me but everybody knows how a family is. It is so rare that both a husband and wife are of the same kind. This happened to me. My brothers loved me but their wives didn’t want me. I met with all kinds of difficulties.

Now I am living with my sister’s son. I am an old woman over 60 years of age—the fire-maker of our family. I cook day after day, but my nephew and his wife and children are always roaming around. If any of my other relations bring me something, they just come and take it away from me. I am really badly treated by my family but I just pray and ask for the strength to face all the bad things which I may meet with. Some of my other relations wanted me to come and live with them, but I just thanked them, for an old woman like myself should never go from home to any other places. No matter how ill-treated I am, I will stay with my nephew until I die. It’s a good thing I never got married or had any children, because these people might not have taken care of us. I do think they just keep me to do their work and be in the house when they wish to go somewhere and stay overnight. I may always be seen in our sleeping-house or in the cooking-house.
(Age about 60)

I was the youngest of three children in our family. The first time I can remember, we were living with our parents on the island of Uea. There were only about three other families besides us living on the island. We got along well with the other families and I thought that we were far away from other countries in the world. Life seemed to be more pleasant than I ever thought because there weren’t many people and I don’t remember anyone ever quarrelling. I knew that my parents worked hard to support us with all that we needed.

My two brothers and I grew bigger but we only heard our parents’ voices telling us that we should be kind to each other. They also told us what we should do if we wanted to grow up to be good men and women. Every day they would instruct us about the right way to act, but I never heard about schools, nor did I know that we were living on an island facing the mainland of Rotuma. Sometimes I saw strangers in our house or in the neighbours’ houses, and sometimes our relatives came, but I wasn’t used to seeing them so I was very shy and withdrawn. Whenever anyone new came, I would stay close to my mother and go wherever she went.

One day my eldest brother went with our uncle who came from Rotuma, and I thought that my brother had died because he was away for many days. I told my parents that I would like to go where my brother was. After a week my brother came home and I felt very glad. I asked him to tell me stories about the place to which he had gone, and he told me all about the crowd of people that he had seen for the first time in his life. Sometime later I overheard my parents talking about our leaving Uea and going to the mainland, and I was very eager to leave. The day finally came and we left the other families on Uea and came ashore on the island of
Rotuma. I was very surprised to see such a crowd and felt very shy to look at the people. We landed in Motusa and went on foot to another district where my father’s relatives were expecting us. I met most of my relatives for the first time, and it was the first time most of them saw me. We began to know each other and after taking a rest I began to wander around the village. Many children of my age accompanied me and I told them about my home which I had come from on Uea. I was used to our quiet place and felt a bit uncomfortable with the strange noises of many people and the pounding of the waves on the beach. But I got used to the place and began to make friends with my neighbours. My brothers helped my father with his work in the bush, and I helped my mother. Later on both of my brothers got married, one after the other, and both went to live in their wives’ homes, so I was left alone with my parents. They treated me so kindly that I never felt like leaving them some day. I obeyed them in whatever they told me to do, and never once did I go anywhere without my mother.

One day my parents told me that I was to get married to a young man who had come to them and asked them if he could marry me. I didn’t want to dispute my father’s wishes because I was a bit frightened of him, so I gave my agreement. I wondered how my parents could do it—have me get married to a man whom I had never known before. I didn’t have any idea what kind of character he had. But I went through with it and we got married and he came to live with my parents. He was a kind man; he loved me and always did what I asked of him without a word. I guess that my father wanted me to marry this man because he was a hard worker and he helped my father a great deal. My mother and I didn’t even have to do any fishing because my husband helped my father and they went fishing for us. What a good and kind husband I got!
Unfortunately, my father got seriously ill one day and died shortly afterwards. I felt so sad that I cried for many days. My husband felt the same way, too. My mother stayed with us after my father died and my husband treated her with great kindness. Whenever I knew of something that would be pleasing to her, all I had to do was tell my husband and he would bring it home for her. She became very old and after a few years she, too, died. I felt strange after she was gone because I didn’t have a parent left to show me the right thing to do when it came to Rotuman customs. Who could I ask questions to when I did not know what should be done when something was called for?

My husband and I stayed together for many years and we had seven children: five sons and twin daughters. How lucky we were to have these children, making a large family. My husband worked very hard to support us with everything we needed, and he treated our children so kindly that it made me think of my parents who were always kind to me until they died. Each of my children entered school as they became of age.

Now we are both getting old and are weak in health. My youngest son and one of my twin daughters and her husband are taking care of us. The rest of my children have married and have gone away to Fiji. I wish they will all live happily with their respective families, like the time we were taking care of them.

One day, a few years ago, I was taken seriously ill and was taken to the hospital. I did worry about myself, but I was mostly concerned about my children, especially my youngest son who hadn’t gotten married yet. But I got well and when I came home my husband sent me to Fiji for a holiday, and I spent three months there. Now we are living here with our daughter and youngest son. I am old and am unable to help my daughter very much with her children.
Chapter 3

Men Born in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century

(Age 56)

I lived together with my mother and father and brothers. As far back as I can remember, my mother and father were always very kind to us, so I lived together with my brothers without worrying about anything. My parents gave us everything that we wanted. I was very happy at that time.

When I was about 10 years old I went to school, but I was not good at school. I only went to school some of the time, but I didn’t really learn anything. Most of the time I only played with my friends. I had a lot of fun between the ages of about 10 and 15 years old. I used to play with my friends at school, and when I came home I would play with my brothers. When I finally came out from school I didn’t know anything, because I had played all the time instead of studying. But I didn’t care much, because at that time there weren’t many rules from the government, so we didn’t worry much about breaking government rules.

Soon after I got out of school, I began making friends with the girls, and I found my life happier every day. Then I met a girl whose ways were very good to everyone. My parents liked this girl very much and they wanted me to marry her, but at that time I didn’t want to get married. I wanted to stay with my friends and I knew that if I married her I would never be able to go out with my friends again. My parents kept trying to change my mind to make me love that girl, and finally I changed my mind and decided to marry her, because I loved my parents. I thought of their kindness to me, and I knew that if I followed their wishes they would do
whatever I wanted for my wedding. But deep in my heart I didn’t want to get married.

I married this girl, but our marriage only lasted for three years, and then we separated. After I was married I found out that the way my parents had treated me when I was young had spoiled me. My wife accused me of being a lazy man, and I think she was right. I guess that’s because when I was young I didn’t have to do any work. My parents let me do whatever I wanted, so nearly every day I did nothing but play. When I got married I was so used to doing nothing that I didn’t want to work. Also, I missed living with my parents and brothers. For nearly a whole week before I got married I cried when I thought of having to leave them and go to live in my wife’s home.

After I separated from my wife I thought of the way my parents had treated me when I was a child, and I realized that it was very bad. I had gotten used to doing nothing and had become very lazy, and it was very hard for me to change my ways.

For nearly a whole year after my father and mother died I felt bad whenever I would think of them. Sometimes, if I would think of them too much, I would cry. The times I thought of them most was when I wanted something and couldn’t get it. Then I would think of the time I was young and they were alive, and how they would always get me what I wanted.

I didn’t get married again until I was nearly 40 years old. By that time I had finally become a man and worked every day. This time I was a good husband and did whatever my wife wanted.

I became a fa ‘es ho’aga, but I don’t like it, because I know now that a leader must be a kind man, so that the people will like him. It would be easier for a rich man, so he could buy the things his people needs. Sometimes, like during a feast when I am served the best foods and treated
with such concern, I remember my mother and father and the way they used to treat me. It was the same kind of thing. When I think of that, I feel pained inside.

By now I have gotten used to living with my wife and being a fa‘es ho`aga and am getting along fine, but to tell the truth the best time of my life was when I was young. I don’t really like married life as much as the time when I was living with my brothers and our parents.
(Age 55)

I lived with my father and mother. By the time I was old enough to know right from wrong, my brothers and sisters had already left home. My oldest brother stowed away on a boat. After my brothers and sisters had left, I lived very happily because I was the only child and I got whatever I asked for. This was the happiest time of my life, because my mother’s brother was the district chief and the people acted very kindly to me.

When I was about 9 years old, my father and mother sent me to live at the Catholic school at Sumi. At this time I acted very cheeky to the other boys and girls, but I didn’t care because if they did anything to me, my mother might get angry.

When I was 12, I fell in love with a girl and talked with her. I wanted to marry her, but my father didn’t like it. He thought I was too young to marry, so he sent me to Fiji. I eventually sailed on a sailboat and learned that being a sailor is the happiest thing a man can do. I was chief engineer and got £12 a month.

While I was working as a sailor, I met and talked to the woman who was to be my wife. I got married in Suva at the age of 32. At this time my brother was the district chief, and when he heard I got married he came to Fiji to bring me back.

Married life was good for the first year, but after that I found out that married life is very hard. When I was young I could do anything I liked, but now it’s different because I had to listen to anything she wanted to say. After a while, my wife’s mother came to her and asked her to bring me to live on her lands in another district. So here I am.

After my children grew up, I felt very sorry to see them stay away from home, and I wish they were here with me.
One of my brothers died and for a whole year I kept thinking about him and feeling very sad. It was a year before I could forget about him.
There were only two children in our family—both sons, and I was the eldest. Our parents were poor and they brought us up in poverty.

Sometimes I think about them and wish they were still alive today so that I might have my chance to look after them. As far back as I can remember, it seems as though they were doing their very best and were doing everything they could for us. My brother and I sometimes roamed through the village with the other children and had nothing more than a piece of cloth around our waist, yet we were the only children in our family. I didn’t know then why we were so poor—whether my parents were lazy, or whether that was all they could possibly do for us. But anyway, we had more than enough food for every meal and never went hungry.

When I reached the age of 7, I began to accompany my friends to school, but sometimes I had to stay home because my clothes were dirty. Many times I felt sorry for my mother because she seemed to be so worried about us whenever she looked at us. I didn’t know whether we were that way because of her or our father. I do remember thinking that my father was to blame, because it was he who seemed to be taking everything so easy. After two years, my younger brother began to attend school with me, but things were still the same. Some days we went, but some days we had to stay back. We were punished in school for wearing dirty clothes, and when we came back and told our parents, I noticed the change that would come over my mother’s face, and she sometimes cried. But my father seemed to take no notice of it. Sometimes we asked our mother why all the other children had so many clothes, while we just had one set each, but she didn’t answer us.

We grew older and I was forced to stay at home and help my father work. I began to work very hard and my mother seemed to become
happier, compared to the time when I was small. I found out that we were poor because of our father’s laziness. When my younger brother left school and helped us work, our family began to live more happily, like others did.

A couple of years after that my dear mother died, leaving my father and us without a woman to take care of us. How sad I was to think of her. I wished she were alive so that we could take care of all her needs and make up for the miserable life she had when we were young. I had seen her so often with a sad face, but she couldn’t tell us why. But now she was dead, and who could we get to look after our things, since we were all men? A little while after she had died, I made up my mind to go to Fiji, and so I did, leaving my father and brother at home.

It was a great pleasure for me to arrive in Fiji—the land that I had hoped to see since I was a small boy. I managed to get a job as a carpenter. One time, when we went to the other side of the island to work, I met a girl and fell in love with her, so I left my work and stayed back in the girl’s village and married her. The people (Fijians) all treated me as if I were their chief. I never had to work, but the girl’s parents always kept a basin full of kava for me to drink and they encouraged me to talk about my home island. I told them some of the legends of Rotuma and how we lived, and they admired our customs, which were so different from theirs. The longer I stayed there, the more I realized how really different their customs were. These people didn’t want me to work, so they made me feel much lazier than I should have been. My wife and I stayed together for many years and we had six children. I did have some difficulty earning money, though, so that I could provide my wife and children with all their needs.

I was getting old by then and had to work hard to be able to sell what we could get, for that was the only means by which we could earn
money in that village. I did my very best and, when my children were all grown up, I left them with their mother and returned to my home in Rotuma. I brought my youngest daughter and son with me, but since they were not used to the people and Rotuman ways, they returned home after two years, leaving me by myself. Now I’m old and weak and can’t work properly, but there isn’t anybody to look after me, so I have to do my best and do all my work everyday.
(Age 54)

I was the oldest in a family of three children. As far back as I can remember my parents were of a very good family but very poor, and I know they had a really hard time earning our living. We were two boys and our sister, who was the youngest, and we knew that we were deeply loved, but our parents didn’t have time to give us constant attention because Daddy worked for Morris Hedstrom to earn money for our living while mother was doing her native work. When we got older, we were expected to share the work in our home.

In our free time we invented our own games, made our own playthings and were wonderfully happy. Many people said that our parents didn’t love us because they always left us at home, but I said they were wrong. Our parents were giving us opportunities to learn self-reliance. Of course they always cooked our food before they went out and left us home.

At that time schools were not so good like today, but every evening our father gave us a lesson in politeness. I took no interest at all in learning, so every lesson given to me was like a vocabulary quiz. When I was about 15, I left school and stayed home to look after our family. My father kept on with his job, while I became a very good farmer for our family.

Being an adolescent boy, I began to make friends with other boys in the village and followed them everywhere they went every evening. A few years later I began to make girlfriends like the older boys. In the beginning I felt very shy to face my girlfriend when we happened to meet each other, but later I was said to be the worst boy ever towards the adolescent girls. I fell in love with many girls I met, but since my parents refused to accept them I had to leave them. At last I met a young woman
whom I really loved, and before telling my parents I brought her home. We were married without my parents’ consent, but I didn’t face them or else we might have had a big quarrel. I built a native hut for my wife, and I left my parents to manage on their own.

Life really changed. When I was single I went everywhere without asking somebody, but then I had to ask my wife’s permission before I went out from our house. How I regretted getting married so young. A year after my marriage feast, my father got seriously ill and died. What a pity to think of him having left our dear mother to think of him whenever she was lonely in the house.

Two years passed and my mother got married again, and this time she was living with her husband in his home. My wife and I stayed together for many years and had many children. There were seven boys and four girls. We have done our very best to earn money for our living and sent them to school, and yet the oldest children came out without any success. They seemed to follow in my footsteps. What a pity to think of the money I had spent on them and not one had succeeded in school. The boys came home and helped me work in the plantations while the girls helped their mother take care of the house and the younger children.

In 1955 one of my relations who had a chiefly title died in another district and I was called to take the title. I left my home and went with my wife and all our children and moved to that district to take the as togi [chiefly title]. I was leading a hoʻaga there. At first people loved us and they seemed to help us in everything we told them to do, but later my wife seemed to be harsh with them and the people hated us, up until now.

I was chosen to be the overseer in the plantations for the district’s cooperative society. After two years, I got tired of the people and left my work and chose someone else to take my place.
I had a good time with my five young sons who left school by then and were helping me in the plantations. I just told them what to do and when I would come afterwards I would see that everything was done as they were told. Seeing that I did not have enough land to cut enough copra to support my family, I sent my boys one after another to Fiji and then their mother afterwards, but unluckily she was not in good health so came back to Rotuma with our eldest son.

A few months ago I was in the hospital. I had an operation on my leg, which made me stay in bed for about a month before I was allowed to walk around with my foot in a cast. I felt better about my situation before I was discharged knowing that my wife and oldest child had returned from Fiji. I knew my son would look after my plantations better than myself. When I came home I was so pleased to see that everything in my home was done as if I had done it myself.

Now I am the chairman of the cooperative society. It is so hard to speak to the older people, but because I was chosen I am trying my very best so that the people of the society would not hate me like those people from the hoʻaga who still hate my wife. I am sending my children over to Fiji so that they can get good jobs and earn enough to help support us. Eventually I will leave this place, the people, and the chiefly title and go to Fiji using my own name, because I have already seen that being a leader here I’m a servant of the people. I think it is much better to stay without an as togi than to be a servant. Older people are very hard to lead.
(Age 53)
There were six in the family, but two of the children died young, leaving four of us. I am the second eldest, my sister being oldest. My younger brother and my youngest sister are still alive.

I lived at home with my mother and father and siblings. From the time I was five years on, my father was a catechist and was appointed to different villages so we moved around a lot. Finally in 1914 my father was sent to Davuilevu for religious training.

I started school in Rotuma the year before we left. It was only a village school—only one hour a day. The main subject during that time was memorizing the Bible, and simple addition. When we went to Fiji, I entered the primary school. The first thing I had to do was learn Fijian. I think I liked school at this time, especially the games. At first I found it strange being with Fijian boys, but only for a while. I stayed there for three years and learned to read and write in Fijian. I could read and write Fijian before I could do so in Rotuman.

After the three years were up, my father was appointed to teach at the Tia school back in Rotuma, since the missionary sister who had been teaching there left the island and there was no one to take her place. I went to the Tia school, and my father was my teacher. He was in charge of about 100 children. I was in the top class—Class 4—but since my father didn’t know English, he only could teach other subjects, like history, arithmetic and religion. I stayed in this school for three years. Father was very good in arithmetic, and I learned it well, as well as some history and geography. I don’t think I liked it very well having my father for a teacher because I always got the heaviest punishment if something happened in the class. He said he did that so that the children wouldn’t feel he was showing favouritism. If he could do that to me, he could do it to the others.
After those three years, I was 13 years old, and my father sent me back to Davuilevu. I entered the primary school again—in Class 4. I lived in a boarding house. We had one house for the Rotuman boys and there were thirteen of us. It was a bit strange at first; I had to do everything for myself—wash my own clothes, iron, do my own cooking. Everything except English seemed too easy for me because I had been studying them in Rotuma for the past three years. In every subject except English I did very well. I stayed in Class 4 for two years because of my English, and in the third year went into Class 5. After a student finished Class 5, which was the highest grade in the primary school, he could sit for the exam to enter teacher’s training. I took the exam and passed and went into teacher’s training at Davuilevu. For three years I was in teacher’s training and received my teacher’s certificate. That was in 1926. I was appointed as an assistant teacher in the primary school at Davuilevu and stayed there for four years.

At the end of 1926, after getting my teaching certificate, I came back to Rotuma and got married. I had seen my wife in 1923 on a visit to Rotuma after I finished primary school. But my father arranged the whole thing while I was in Fiji. He just told me to come to Rotuma and get married and take my wife back to Fiji with me. I didn’t mind, so I consented.

What actually happened is that while in Fiji I met a Rotuman nurse and wanted to marry her. She said if our parents agreed, she would agree, so I sent a letter to my father, but he told me no, that he would choose a wife for me, and he did.

I found marriage all right, maybe because my parents chose the right one. My wife seemed to be unhappy at the beginning, because it was the first time she left her people. I felt responsible for her and did
everything I could to make her happy. Whatever she wanted I tried my best to get it for her. After about a year she got fully adjusted. After about two years I sent her for a holiday to Rotuma to visit her family.

After my four years in Davuilevu, in 1931, I was sent to Rotuma to teach at the Motusa school. Rotuma didn’t seem like it had changed much. The only thing that seemed hard was the school. I was in charge of 140 children, ranging from Class 1 to Class 5. After two years, I was sent to the Paptea school. I stayed in the Paptea school for two years, and then in 1935 I decided to go back to Davuilevu as a theological student to study for the ministry. I took the exam for entrance and passed and was accepted. I decided to go into the ministry mainly as the result of an incident with the D.O. [District Officer] at the time. I was teaching Sunday school in Motusa, but most of the students were going out to the golf course in Motusa to carry clubs and earn a few shillings. I decided to get tough on them and told them one time that if they missed next Sunday I would give them a good hiding. As a result, the D.O., Dr. Carew, who was an ardent golfer, didn’t have anyone to carry his clubs that Sunday and he got angry and sent for me. He told me that I couldn’t do that, because I wasn’t a minister. So I decided to become one.

After studying for two years in Davuilevu, I was sent by the Church to Australia to do deputation work—encourage people in Australia to donate to the overseas missions. I left my wife and two children at Davuilevu. My first child had been born after five years of marriage. Australia was very strange to me—the language and the coolness. I was still very weak in English. I stayed in Australia for almost nine months. During that time I travelled a lot and sometimes stayed in two different homes in one week. Most of the time I spent visiting people’s homes. I also visited schools and churches and preached on Sundays. After nine months
in a strange country, I was happy to come back to Fiji again. When I
returned, they sent me to Rotuma and I was put in charge of the Noa’tau
circuit. I liked being a minister. I felt like I was helping the people. I spent
two years as a minister in Noa’tau, and then I answered a church
advertisement for a native minister to work among the half-castes in
Northern Australia. The Church accepted and I was appointed there in
1940. I spent five years in Northern Australia and a year in Sydney. I only
spent one year with the half-castes; after that they evacuated the half-castes
and our women and children south, because of the war. My wife and
children were sent to Sydney and I transferred to native work—working
with the Aborigines. It was very hard—the language was difficult. It wasn’t
so much religious work that I did among them; it was mostly agricultural
work. Every morning we took them to the field, planting sweet potatoes.

I joined my family again in Sydney at the end of 1945. I was happy
to see them again. The youngest one was frightened of me because she
didn’t remember me. We didn’t intend to stay in Sydney that long, but all
the boats were booked up with returning wives of servicemen, etc., so we
ended up staying for about a year. During that year they put me on
deputation work again, so I stayed busy and did plenty of travelling.

I finally got back to Fiji in early 1947, and the Church appointed
me as superintendent of the Rotuma circuit. I stayed as superintendent
until last year, 1959. I retired because the Church wanted me to go to Fiji,
but my wife was not in good enough health to go about and I thought it
would be better to retire from the work rather than take her away from
Rotuma. Now I am a supernumerary minister and I’m assisting as a
teacher in the Malhaha school. I am not a registered teacher now, but
because of the shortage of teachers, the D.O. and school committee
appointed me to help out. It’s been a long while, and the method of teaching has changed, so it’s a bit difficult, but I like it.

Now I have six children. The oldest daughter got married two years ago to a European minister in Australia and the next oldest girl is a school teacher in Motusa. My eldest son is at the Suva Grammar School; he’s taking a special course, since he passed his university entrance (New Zealand) last year. My third oldest girl is at Adi Cakabau secondary school; she passed her senior Cambridge, but she’s sitting for her university entrance this year. The two youngest children are here in the Malhaha school, both in Class 7.
When I was a small boy we stayed inside the Upu [Catholic mission] fence. It was about 1912 and I was only 4 or 5 years old. I remember one time when the boys (school boarders) went to the bush. I went to the boys’ house to look around and I saw a bottle of hair oil, only that wasn’t hair oil—it was poison. I put some on my hand and wanted to put it on my hair, but it burned my hand and the side of my leg. It hurt very much. My mother took me to the Sisters and they bandaged me up.

I remember one time when I went to the bush with my father. He was working on his plantation. I was looking around and saw that there were some watermelons growing on the plantation next to ours so I went over and picked one and began to eat it. When I was finished I went back to where my father was working. He must have smelled the watermelon, because he asked me where I got the watermelon. I just pointed and said, “Over there.” He got very angry at me—maybe because he knew it was the first time I stole something—and he wanted to frighten me. He told me he was going to kill me and told me to kneel down and say my last prayer. I kneeled down and prayed to myself. Then my father asked me if I had finished and I said yes. He asked me what God had said to me, and I answered, “God said please don’t kill me.” This was the first time I can remember that my father was angry at me. I was about 6 or 7 years old at the time.

When I was 6 years old … it was Christmas Eve and my father killed a pig and told me to boil some water for cleaning the pig. I was supposed to put the pig in boiling water for a few minutes and then scrape the hair off, but some boys came by after I put the pig in the water and I went off to play with them. I stayed away too long and when I came back the pig had been in the water too long—it was just like cooked. I couldn’t
take the hair off because the skin came right off with it. My father got 
angry at me and told me I would get no dinner that night.

I remember another time my father went to the bush and left me 
and my mother and my brother at home. My brother and I saw my 
father’s stone for sharpening his knife and we wanted to try it. My brother 
turned the stone and I took one of my father’s knives and put it against the 
stone. Only I was too young and didn’t know how to do it. I put the point 
against the stone and it was no good. My father got very angry at me when 
he returned from the bush. He gave me and my brother a hiding.

There was another time with my mother. She wanted me, but I 
had gone away from the house. She got very wild with me and took a stick 
to come and find me. I was near the beach and when I saw her coming I 
climbed a tree to hide myself, but when she got close to me the branch 
broke and I fell down with the branch. When she caught me she picked 
me up, because I was still small—about 8 or 9 years old—and she turned 
my feet and hit me on the bottom of my foot. After that she took me 
home.

In about 1914 we moved to the Catholic mission place in another 
district. My father was the *fekau* [a layman appointed to look after the 
Catholics in a district]. I started school at about 6 years old at the village. I 
went for about two years, until I was about 8 years old, but I don’t 
remember much about it.

One time all the people came to clean the mission grounds and fix 
the roof of the church. There were some young children there, too—boys 
and girls about 7 to 9 years old. I was 8 or 9 years old at the time. I was 
rolled up in a Rotuman mat with some other children and my mother 
must have heard my voice because she came and uncovered me. I think I 
was holding a little girl—maybe kissing or something. The girl was 7 or 8
years old. They never talked to me about it because I was too small, but they wanted to punish me.

We had two houses, but there was a long distance between them. One was inside the mission fence and the other was down by the beach—maybe 300 yards away. Every night we had supper about six or seven in the evening in the house by the beach. That night my father told me that I should sleep in this house alone to watch the food so no one would steal it. They didn’t tell me I was being punished, and I thought that what he told me is right—that they wanted me to watch the food. But when I got older I knew they must have been punishing me. If it were true, they would have had my brother sleep there with me. I stayed there by myself for about three months. It was very dark and there were no houses nearby, only the cemetery. I wanted to run away but I was afraid. I was afraid of my father and afraid of the spirits, or ghosts, you know, the atua [souls of the dead].

Now I’ll tell you about the first time I ate dog meat. My friend tricked me. He asked me if I wanted some puak veo [pork cooked in an earth oven] and I said yes. He gave me some meat and I ate it. Then he asked me, “Do you eat dog meat?” and I said no. Then he told me that the meat he gave me was dog meat, and I said that it tasted good. I was about 10 years old at that time.

Actually my childhood was a happy time. Sometimes we played cricket, sometimes we went for a swim. During Christmas time we sometimes took a horseback ride around the island … we might stop at Fuli’u [in Lopta] for a swim. Sometimes we’d stop at one of my relative’s houses and have dinner there. One old man who lived there had a bad leg. He said he loved us children but he had a bad leg and apologized for not being able to climb a coconut tree to get coconuts. …
Then there was *manea hune'ele* [beach games played by the adolescent boys and girls during the Christmas season] … we were too young to play but sometimes we went to the beach to watch the adolescent boys and girls.

When I was 12 years old, I went to stay at school in Sumi and boarded there. That was in 1921. Sister Elizabeth’s grandfather was my teacher. He taught us the ABCs in Rotuman. That’s when I became interested in girls and learned about making love. We used to return from school by the beach instead of the road … the boys and girls together. Sometimes we would go for a swim in the water. Sometimes the boys learn from the girls, sometimes the girls from the boys. I learned from a girl. It was mostly kissing and things like that.

I can remember one Sunday after the last prayer I was supposed to beat the wooden drum, the kind like the Methodists use to call people to church—to call the angels. I was supposed to hit it three times, then three times, then three times. But this day it started to rain before I was finished so I ran away to get out of the rain. My father got angry at me and made me kneel by the drum in the rain.

One time when I was 14 or 15 years old, it was near Christmas time. I saw some girls going to swim. At that time not many people had short pants for swimming. My father had a new pair of *ha'la ne mose* [long-john pajamas]—very nice, with blue stripes. I saw the girls going to swim so I stole my father’s pants and went after the girls. Some girls were married, but some not married, and one of my cousins was with them. The others I didn’t know. When the girl I liked jumped into the water I jumped in right after her. She went right to the bottom of the water—maybe about two fathoms deep—and I caught her. She was very tired and wanted to go to the top but I held her down. She started to bite me and
pulled my father’s pants—that day the pants were finished. She made many holes in them … maybe she was about 16 years old. When she got to the top she swore like hell because she said she nearly died, and I got angry at her. My cousin said, “You are wrong. You held her under water and you got angry at her when she swore at you.” When my cousin told me I was wrong I told her to shut up—that it was none of her business. So my cousin told the girls to return home because I was mad—had lost my mind. “He plays with a girl and gets angry.”

I got angry because she swore at me; she called me a silly fool and things like that. I was afraid to go home with my father’s pants like that—because they were torn—so I took them off and threw them into the sea. My father didn’t find out for a long time.

My first real experience with a girl was when I was 16 years old. I met her by the side of the road at night and started talking to her. We went right to the side of the road and did it right away. She had the reputation of being a larrikan [promiscuous] girl. When I was young there were plenty of girls. There were many different ways. I remember one girl. Many boys tried to go to her at night and make love to her, but she always threw them out. But if you went to her and didn’t wake her up you could do anything you want and she’d never stop you. She’d pretend to be asleep … but not really asleep. … The boys and girls in Rotuma were very smart to make love without getting caught.

If you wanted to be with a woman, you talked to her before and she would tell you where to go, sometimes at night, but sometimes in the daytime, too. I was very sly. Sometimes when it was raining and I knew there was an adolescent girl alone in a house I would go inside and start talking to the girl. Then we would go to the bed just like it was night time.
The only thing is that the girls were afraid the boy would tell about her, so if she knew you were the kind of boy who would tell about her then she wouldn’t like you, but if she knew you wouldn’t tell, then it was all right. But the girls were different, some easy, some hard. Some you had to talk with for a long time and go slowly, but some were very quick.

When I was young it was good, but now I’m too old. My body is too weak. When you’re 20 or 30, your body is strong and it’s good, but when you’re 40 you rest, and when you’re 50 you’re too weak.

One day when I was about 16 or 17 years old I got sick and had to go to the hospital for about two weeks. I had a fever—about 103 degrees, the doctor said. When I returned home from the hospital, my brother was playing with another boy and he got angry at him and spat at him. I saw him and got angry and wanted to smack him, because he’s my brother and I didn’t like him to act that way with the other boys. I smacked his head and hit his face, but too hard and knocked him out. He fell down and blood was coming out of his nose. When he got up he cried and went right home—back to our father and mother. When my father saw him he got very angry. After that, every Sunday for about three months when he came to church at Sumi he never talked to me or gave me anything. That’s why I wanted to become a lay brother, meaning I have no more father. I went to see Father Griffon. He asked what I wanted and I told him I wanted to become a lay brother. He told me to wait—that he’ll write a letter to the Bishop and when he received a reply I could go to Fiji. When the letter returned, I went to Fiji. I wasn’t angry at my father by the time I left—that was finished—but it was too late. The letter was already written.

It was in Fiji that I learned to play the organ and what do you call it … the trumpet. In 1928 we went to play for Cardinal Charity in Suva.
The Cardinal came from Rome to Sydney to attend a conference and then he went to Fiji on his way to America. I shook hands with Cardinal Charity and the Bishop said to him that these were some Rotuman boys, and Cardinal Charity said, “I know.”

The school was at Loreto, on Ovalau. Sometimes we went to the bush to cut copra, sometimes we went fishing. At that time we were learning philosophy and theology. School was hard, but not too hard.

In 1929 I came back to Rotuma and stayed at Sumi. Now I live alone with my old mother, but most of the time I go to sleep in the house of a widow friend that I provide with food and money. I am the organist at the Upu Mission Church and go to church often.
Chapter 4
Women Born in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century

(Age 55)

There were only two of us in our family—my brother and I, who was the younger. We were a very poor family, but I remember that our parents did their best for us. There was no school at that time so my brother and I never learned anything. We just realized things by our wisdom and reason, and when we got older we learned to do things just by getting used to it and learning to help my mother. I never went to any other villages without my mother. Sometimes I would go away for about two weeks, but always accompanied by my mother. When I was still an adolescent my parents died and my brother and I lived with our relations. What a pity to see us. We didn’t know how to work properly to please our new family, so many times we hardly had enough food to eat. Sometimes we had only one meal a day. We didn’t blame ourselves because we knew our parents had spoiled us and by then they were dead and we were badly treated by their relations.

I began to make friends with my neighbours and I knew they began to love me for they all knew how badly my family treated me. I spent most of my days with my friends while my brother continued to live with our family. There were three of us who became good friends and we stayed together in one home. We stayed this way until one of my friends got married and she took me with her. I lived with my friend and her husband. She loved me as if I were her real sister and yet we were just friends. We lived together until one day she asked me if I would like to get married, because there was an adolescent boy who wanted to marry me.
but was a bit too shy to speak to me. I just told her that if she knew the boy would love me and would realize that getting married was not just a matter of a few months, but of a lifetime—but if she knew he was a good boy and she liked him, then I said I would agree. She was really a good friend for me because she did choose the right man. We got married in a few months and began a family of our own. I didn’t know how to work properly and yet I was lucky because I married a kind man. He helped me sometimes and always spoke kind words when we were together. We stayed together only four years and had one daughter, but unluckily my husband died. How could I imagine the one who loved me being put into his hidden home [his grave]; and our daughter was only about 2 years old.

My brother and his wife came and took us with them. It was a good thing my sister-in-law was a nice woman or else my daughter and I would have had a rough time. Whatever she did for her own children she did for my daughter. She loved her as if she were one of her own children. One day my brother asked me if I would like to travel to Fiji and I told them that if they could send me I would be very pleased. So they did send me and I went to Fiji and stayed there for four years. A few years after that my daughter got married and had a family of her own. I have lived with them from then up to now. My daughter had two sons and I helped to look after them, and I did domestic work and native work for my daughter, for I know that now I am very old and very soon I may die, and she’ll be alone to do all the work herself.
(Age 53)
As far back as I can remember, I lived with my parents and brothers and sisters. My mother and father were very kind to us and as children we were very happy. We used to play together every day. Sometimes we could joke with my mother, but I was afraid to joke with my father because sometimes he would punish me. He was the one who always punished the children in our family so I didn’t want to joke with him.

When I was 6 years old my father sent me to school. I liked school very much, because at that time the schools in Rotuma weren’t very good, and we only had to learn a few things, so most of the time we spent playing with our friends. I made plenty of friends in school and we played and joked all the time. I liked it better in school than the time when I was with my brothers and sisters at home.

I left school when I was 14 years old and I stayed with my brothers and sisters at home. Most of the time I spent at home helping my mother, but on holidays I used to go out with my girl friends and look for fun. Sometimes we went out and met boys. We would talk to them and joke, just like we really knew them well. One day I met a boy and every time that I used to go out with my friends I used to talk and joke with him. I watched the way he acted and began to like him very much. Deep in my heart I was in love with him, but I didn’t know whether he loved me or not, so I joked with him and always hid my love.

One night I went with my brothers to a dance and I met him. That night he was drunk, and when I danced with him he told me all about his love for me, so I told him that I loved him, too. I told him that I started to love him from the first day we met, and that if he really loved me he would come and tell my parents so we could get married. He came and talked to
my parents and we got married soon afterwards. I was 16 years old at the time.

We got married and really loved each other very much. I was very happy because I was living with the one I loved best. Being married was better than being single. My husband was a very kind man and always did his best for me and our children, and I always did my best to take care of him, especially preparing the food to eat.

My husband died in 1950. I was lucky that I had plenty of sons so I still got everything I wanted from them. I felt sad for a whole month after my husband died. Whenever I would look at his picture during that time I would cry. I thought about his kindness to me when he was alive. I’ll never marry again until I die.
Men Born in the 1910s

(Age 44)
I was the second oldest in a family of three children. There were the two of us brothers, and our sister, who was the youngest. We were brought up by our dear parents, who at the time did their very best to afford us with all that we needed. Whatever we asked them for they were ready to give us. I can remember that we were living in my father’s home.

They were really kind and always told us to play and love each other, even to love our neighbouring friends, never mind that they would insult us. Before we entered school, Mother already gave us some lessons in politeness and obedience. I sometimes obeyed but sometimes not, so my parents seemed to love the other two more than myself. They seemed to take no care at all if they heard anything about my name. The neighbours began to speak about me because I became very cheeky to them.

I hated school but because we had to go, I just went and paid no attention at all to the teacher. They frightened me with everything they had but I remained a brave and a disobedient pupil. For five years I was in school but never once was I given a reward or even promoted.

I left school and began to help my father and elder brother in their plantations. They liked me because I worked very well and helped them a lot. Unluckily, our dear father died, leaving only the two of us with our sister and dear mother. My brother was older and a bit wiser and showed me how to act towards my mother and our sister. Mother felt so sad about her husband’s death that she ate very little every day for about three months, and we felt the same way too. We loved her because although our father rested in peace she was still mourning him.
We lived together for a few years until my brother got married and went to his wife’s home. I took care of the rest of us. I did my best and my mother used to tell me if my father were alive he would be lucky to have me helping him in his plantation. Although I was only 15 years old, I brought food into our kohea [native kitchen] like an old man. I cut copra and worked in every possible way to earn money for my mother and sister. I gave them everything they would need before they would ask me. My mother used to tell me that I had changed my manners; she never thought that I would become so kind as I was then.

I began to roam in the evenings. We went to other villages and sought pleasure among the adolescent boys and girls whom we met. The young men in our village had a club and we went out every night, whether it rained or not. After a few months I felt that I began to love one of the adolescent girls. I spoke to her and I know she felt the same way. I told my mother, but since my father was dead she told me to wait for a while. One of my relations knew about it and came and told my mother that if I wanted to get married, and if she would give her agreement, he would help. The matter was talked over and the wedding day was set, but the girl changed her mind and ran away with another boy. I was so ashamed, but what could I do with no more wedding to be talked about? My friends and I kept on roaming to other villages. I then met a woman whose husband had died and left her with a daughter. I began to speak to her and when I knew she was in love with me I began to stay away from home. I knew my mother wouldn’t like her because of our different religions, and when I told the woman about this she brought her daughter and came to my home. My mother did not like this kind of wedding but I told her there was nothing more to be done; we would just get married this way.
This woman was very kind to my mother and my sister. A year later my sister got married and left us, and my mother married again, so only my wife and I were left in our family. My mother is still alive and living in her husband’s home. She’s now weak and very feeble and her son (my half-brother) is looking after her.

My wife and I stayed together for many years and we had many children. I seemed to be hated by the people in our village but I didn’t know why; maybe I was a bit cheeky to them. I am now getting old and can’t work properly in my plantations, so most days during the week I spend fishing in the sea. My wife didn’t like to fish, or maybe she didn’t know how, so I had to go fishing without her. My two adopted 10-year-old sons are working in my plantations instead of going to school. My wife doesn’t do a thing, so to avoid quarrelling I have to do all the work for her. I think that’s why all my relations seem to look down on me and my family.
(Age 43)

Only three days after I was born, my mother died. Then I lived with my mother’s mother. My grandmother was very poor, but she got our clothes and things in payment for her sarao [massage]. My father married again and I moved to live with him and his wife at the age of 6. It was better living with my grandmother than with my father and stepmother, because my grandmother liked to give me things but my stepmother didn’t. I found out that if you live with your stepmother or stepfather they will treat you differently than their own children. My father loved my stepmother and sometimes he didn’t like the way she treated me, but he was afraid to talk for fear that they might get angry at each other and separate.

My father sent me to school at Upu mission when I was about 10 years old. I was happy in school because I met plenty of boys and girls and it was fun being with your friends every day.

I got married while I was in school, to a half-European woman. I soon found married life the happiest time of my life. Every day when I came home she would prepare food for me. She was a kind woman and would save money—almost five shillings out of the six I made in a day’s work at Morris Hedstrom.

When my wife died I thought of her every day because I had to take care of the children. It was very hard for me without a woman to look after my children, so I got married again. This marriage was different from the one with my first wife. This wife is not as kind as the last one. The way she treats the children by my first wife is different from the way she treats her own. I do really love my wife, but sometimes I feel bad about the way she treats my children, so I decided to send my children to their mother’s side. Now I live alone with my wife and our own children, and it seems just the same now as in the beginning when I got married to my first wife.
(Age 41)

There were four children in our family, and I was the youngest. As far back as I can remember, our parents loved us and my father worked very hard to afford us with everything we needed. My father died when I was young and not long after his death my mother got married again to a man from another district. My stepfather loved me since I was the only child in the family [who was still at home], and he took me everywhere he would go when he visited with the neighbours. He bought me anything I would ask him for.

He sent me to school and told me to try hard so that one day he might see me working in an office. I saw my teacher with starched clothes and I wished and hoped that one day I would be able to follow his footsteps, but unluckily I got seriously ill and was forced to stay away from school. I got a pain in my back and was in bed for a long time. I had a disease of the spinal column and it appeared in my back as what the natives call tö‘ta. My teacher told me to stay home, and after that I didn’t go to school again. My stepfather took me with him to his plantations and got me any kind of fruit he could find. Other children began to laugh at me because my back looked so strange to them, and as I grew that thing grew bigger. When I was already a grown man, I was still very short, and most people would look at me as a youth.

I made friends with my neighbours and went out with them (the adolescent boys) and found much pleasure in going from village to village. Adolescent girls seemed to laugh at me because of my strange build, but I took no notice of them. Every place I went, people seemed to laugh at me.

Many times I went with my stepfather to his plantations and he showed me how to plant and told me to work hard and learn well how to work in a plantation, so that one day I might be able to keep a plantation.
by myself without anybody to lead me. I worked with him and helped him as best I could. The day my stepfather died I cried as if he were my real father. I thought of the way he treated me and how kind he was to me and my mother.

My elder brother got married and my two sisters looked after my dear mother, who is now blind and very old and isn’t able to do anything. I’m now working very hard to help my brother who lives in the same family with us. Since I’m a cripple I never once thought of getting married because I knew that no woman would ever look at me—they only laugh at me. I had a swollen joint once and it didn’t cure properly and it ended up that I couldn’t bend my knee any more, and I became funnier than ever in my appearance to the people, but I couldn’t help it, because my Creator wanted me to grow up this way.

I’m now helping my brother to look after his children, and I try to bring home whatever my nieces and nephews wish for and their father cannot provide. My blind mother is still alive and her two daughters are not married. The four of us are living with her and treating her kindly, the way she treated us when we were young.
Chapter 6
Women Born in the 1910s

(Age 48)
There were five of us in our family in which I was the second youngest; there were three boys and two of us were girls. We were kindly brought up by our parents as far back as I can remember, living in my mother’s home. I knew they loved us, but I was the real pet in the family. The others could cry for something and my parents would provide it in two or three days, but for me they were in great haste to bring it to me. I wondered why my parents loved me that much more than my sister and three brothers. Many times I overheard my parents talking and my mother would say that they had to do their very best and bring home whatever I would ask for because when I grew up I would be the most beautiful girl on the island, so they had to see that I wouldn’t be in want of something. Whenever a feast (katoʻaga) would be held somewhere on the island, my mother always sewed me a new dress and took me with her. Everywhere she went, I would be with her.

At home I used to roam around the village playing with the children in the neighbourhood. My mother always looked for me to come home for dinner, but as soon as I finished eating, off I went to my playmates. I never did anything at home, just roam, eat, and sleep, because I was the pet and nobody in the family was allowed to say something to me except my mother.

They sent me to school with my brothers, but since I worked as I pleased, I only went to school when I wished to. Most days in the week I stayed home, but no one scolded me. It seemed to me that my mother
preferred me to be at her side day in and day out. The teacher told my mother not to let me be absent so often so I would learn something, but I didn’t change. I was so spoilt and became more and more disobedient, but my parents still sided with me all the time. When I grew up I began to think more wisely, but it was too late. I was too old and still in the lower classes. My parents told me to leave school when I was 15 years of age, but never once did I receive a reward in school, and I couldn’t read or write properly.

I stayed home to help my mother and the more I was with her, the more I heard her talking about my beauty. She used to tell me to act like this and that so that people would look at me, but by then I was a bit wiser and began to tell my mother that she was making me worse than other children in the village.

I began to make friends with other adolescent girls in the village and played games at night with adolescent boys who would come from other villages. After a few months I met a boy who seemed to love me in return, and I told my parents that they would like him if he spoke to them. He did come one day with his father, and not long afterwards our dreams came true; we got married and stayed in my home. Life seemed to have changed, and whatever I would do I had to think of my husband, not my parents like before. My husband was a hard-working man and very kind to my parents and me.

Unluckily, my mother died a year after our marriage, and everyone could imagine the sadness that overtook me during the day of her funeral and a few days afterwards. I really felt sorry for her death, because I knew she loved me a great deal and never used harsh words with me. My husband and I went to his home and stayed for a couple of years when I gave birth to a daughter. We felt so glad to have a child of our
own. But my husband went off one day with his gun and didn’t return. When people went in search of him they found him dead. I didn’t know whether it was an accident or he shot himself purposely. With whom would I stay now that my kind husband and both my parents were dead? I came to our village and stayed with a cousin and his wife. I had a daughter, but they treated me as if I were one of their own children. They loved my daughter, who then was able to walk.

I began to roam again like an adolescent girl. After a few months I ran away with an adolescent boy and my daughter. At the beginning this boy’s parents liked me, but later on they didn’t want to stay with us any longer and built a native house for themselves. My husband and I have stayed together for many years and we’ve had many children, but he was not like my first husband, who was a hard-working man. He was kind to me, but many things I needed he just told me that he couldn’t get them. I then thought back to my parents and my first husband, but what could I do; we had more than five children.

Now we are both getting old and only two of our children are still in school; the rest are out of school and two are already married. My husband is unable to work properly and is only a weak old man who struggles to provide food for us. I thought of leaving him, but where would I go? He could only cut copra and go fishing, and if I wanted something he would go to the old man at the far end of our village to ask him. Now that I am getting old, I have to stay home and wait until my husband can bring something home to satisfy me.
(Age 46)

Remembering the past times when I was living with my uncle, I think I was the saddest living creature ever to exist at that time. My poor mother was living with her brother and his wife, and I was with her. I remember well that I had a bad time with my uncle. They had many children and yet they hated me like an animal. I grew up without knowing my father, and my mother never mentioned to me who and where my father was, dead or alive.

I went to school when I was small, but my uncle only paid my school fees for three years, so I left school and helped at home. I loved to play with my cousins, but some days I saw that they didn’t want to play with me. They (my cousins) all went to school. I heard that my teacher said that if one studied hard they would get good results, but how was I to study hard? My mother couldn’t afford sending me to school, and my uncle wanted me to stay home.

I was badly treated, so one day I ran away to my cousin and his wife. They had only four children and treated me as if I were one of their children. I told them how my uncle treated me and my cousin invited me to come with him at that time. He was willing to pay my school fees if I would study hard, but by then it was too late. I was over 14. My mother came and wanted me to go with her and I refused, but my cousin told me to go because my mother came and asked him in the Rotuman way. I went with my mother, but only two weeks passed and I was treated the same way as before. I did all the household work—cleaned the house, did the washing and cooking, had to go fishing. I was just like a labourer to my uncle and his wife. I never went to dances and cinemas and even had no chance of going with other girls.
One day my cousin came and told my mother that he wanted me to marry a man. He was sure that I would live happily if I would get married to him. I didn’t like that man because he had been married before, but my mother and my cousin forced me to marry him and at last I gave my consent to them.

We got married and because my uncle was so unkind to me we went to live in my husband’s home. We stayed happily together. My husband was so nice that I never thought of going back to my uncle. He brought me nice food and everything I wanted before I could ask him to bring it. We stayed together for only five years when he died. I was really sad because I knew that I would have to go back to my uncle and perhaps stay with him throughout life. We had no children and I was lonely again. By then my uncle no longer treated me badly because I was older and helped him and his wife. I even went and helped him in his plantations. Then my mother died and I was left alone with my uncle.

Since then I met another young man who I knew would treat me nicely like my first husband, but my uncle wouldn’t agree to it because of our different religions. I knew that this young man would love me, so I left my uncle and ran away with him. We got married and have lived together ever since and still I haven’t any children. I’ve adopted my sister-in-law’s children and treat them as my own. Whenever I thought of the time with my uncle, I never knew that one day I would live a happy life. I was so ill treated by him that I think I will never forget about it. I pity my mother who really had a rough time with her brother, and I wish she was still alive so that I could treat her nicely. My second husband has the same character as my first one. We are living together without quarrelling and I think I am very lucky to have married these two kind men, one after another.
(Age 45)

We were six children in our family and I was the eldest. We lived on a farm in Fiji when my father was working there. We had a good time with our parents; they loved us and treated us kindly. My mother taught me how to work and I was a great help to her. I played with my younger brothers and sisters while she did the cooking and washing for us. I knew she would get very tired and sometimes I cleaned our dormitory and the surroundings for her. When I entered school, I left my mother to do her work and to look after the others, but when I came home after school I did what I could to help her.

One day my mother brought us to this island of Rotuma. She said that we just came to spend the Christmas with her parents and would return after three months. What a pity, we stayed and months passed and we never returned to Fiji. I had to stay away from school and my brothers and sisters hardly went to school. I wished I could go to school but there wasn’t anybody to pay for my school things.

My father left my mother and took another wife, so my mother had to take care of us and, poor thing, how could she earn enough money to support everything for the six of us? I knew how poor we were, so I was very obedient to my mother and so were my siblings. Later my mother got married again but her new husband hated us. They quarrelled too much. By that time I was old enough to know about a family, so I took my brothers and sisters to our grandparents. So we were brought up by our grandparents who loved us very much, but they were getting old, so my auntie and her husband took care of us; they lived with us in the same home. We went to school, but by that time it was a bit late to learn, so after two years I left school and helped with the work at home.
I made friends with a neighbouring girl about my age and we had good times. We knew each other very well and we always had the same mind when we wished to do something. It was then that I began to make friends with boys, but I was afraid that my grandparents might become very angry with me. One day I told my auntie and grandmother that I had a boyfriend and they didn’t like it and told me not to make any more boyfriends, so I didn’t. I stayed away from my friends for a few days and did not even go out in the evenings. Then one day my grandmother told me that I was going to get married. She knew that that man would take good care of me. I wondered what sort of a man my grandparents would give me to. All the days before I got married I thought of leaving my grandparents and running away to find a new home for myself, but my conscience told me to wait; maybe it was the right thing my people were doing to me.

It was really right! We got married even though I didn’t know the man before and I was a bit frightened of him, but he was very kind to me. Two weeks after our wedding we went to his home. He wanted us to live there. Soon after my brothers and sisters came and stayed with us. He took good care of us. He loved us and we stayed in his home as if we were with our own parents.

Now we have only two children living with us. We are still taking care of my brothers and sisters along with our children. I enjoyed having a family of my own, with nobody to speak to us except myself. Now my family is still the same and not even once has my husband grumbled about my brothers and sisters; he is the same every day and treats them so kindly, and our children live happily with us.
(Age 45)

I was the oldest of three children who had different fathers and were brought up in three different homes. I can remember being brought up by my dear mother without someone to care for us. Poor me and my mother, who was doing all she could to provide us with food and earn money for our living. She was strong enough to work like a man. I had everything I wished for and all the food I wanted. There were only two of us in the family then, and she really did enough to support us. She used to speak about the wealthy people and the poor ones; they lived the same and death came to everyone, whether rich or poor. She always told me to keep quiet about the things that wealthy children had because she couldn’t provide them, as I didn’t have a father to help her give me all that I needed.

She sent me to school, but at that time I didn’t feel like studying and stayed home with my mother. We were poor and she couldn’t afford everything. Most days I stayed home and instead of going somewhere else she would sometimes spend a few hours with me talking about our future and how I should act to be kind to my friends and everybody in the neighbourhood. I did as she told me, but sometimes the weather changed and I didn’t feel well, and I’m sure my character changed too.

When I grew older, I became wiser and my mother could trust me to do her work and to help her however I could. My friends always told me to come with them and at the beginning I refused because I wasn’t old enough to follow them. Later I joined them and everywhere they went I followed. It happened that I met a boy who seemed to love me, and as I thought of my poor mother, I wished that boy really loved me so that my dear mother wouldn’t have to work so hard. That boy spoke to me many times, but I was scared that he might leave me, so I went with him to his home. Life so changed and I felt as if I were in a new world. The boy was
very kind, and when I brought him home he was kind to my mother. He worked very hard, so my mother stopped going to the bush like a man. Now she had someone to take her place. My mother was used to hard work; she did all our work at home, but I was like a child. My husband and I stayed for many years and had two sons and two daughters, but unluckily my daughters died and only my sons survived. The elder one has gone on a voyage to Fiji and our younger son is with us.

How could you imagine the sadness that overtook me when my daughters died, one after the other. I wanted a daughter because I love girls, so because we had no more children, I took my cousin’s daughter and then a son and adopted them as my own. How I love kids to be with me at home. Now it is so pitiful to see my dear old mother weak and feeble; she is like a child to me. I have to care for her like my two little wards. My husband and I are both getting old, and yet my husband is still strong enough to afford us with all that we need. We treat my mother kindly in return for the hard work she had done for me when I was small up until I got married. Before, all my relations stayed away from me because there was only myself and my poor mother and they didn’t want us to join their family, but now that my husband is a hard-working man, their eyes seem fixed on me whenever they want something. I am now supporting my own family and never think of calling on any relations in want of something.
(Age 44)

There were only two of us children in the family. I was younger than my brother, and we were living with our dear father as far back as I could remember. My parents had a row one day and our mother left us with him; she went home and didn’t come back to him again. I was growing older and can remember that he brought another woman to take care of us when he went to work. This woman brought us up and she loved us, but still I can say that if she were our real mother she would have cared more for us. We went to school and sometimes we had breakfast but sometimes we didn’t. Sometimes our clothes were very dirty and we had to stay home. She gave us hidings when she wanted us to do something and we did not.

My father always told us to do our best in school because that was the only way to earn our own living and nobody would look down on us if we could get a good job. We really did our best and my brother later became an engineer, but I gave up learning and stayed home to look after my father. My father got married again but my stepmother wasn’t nice to me, so I left them and went to live with my auntie. She was nice to me, but still she wasn’t my real mother, and sometimes I knew she was wild with me by the way she acted.

I began to make friends and then boyfriends with anybody whom I would meet, no matter whether I knew him or not. I was acting this way, and then my auntie found out about it and she scolded me and she wanted me to go back to my father. I went back home but was still doing the same thing. Later on someone came and wanted me to marry him and my father gave his consent. I never knew this man before but because of his smart way of speaking my father thought that he would really love me, so that was why he gave him his agreement.
We got married and stayed at my home for a few months. Then this husband of mine began to show me his character. We stayed quietly together for a few months, then began to know each other’s characters. He didn’t have good manners towards my family and was lazy so I told him that we should go to his home, and yes, we did go. There I found life hard and miserable. He went out every night, I knew not where, and sometimes he came back home drunk and made us quarrel. I held and held my anger until one day I had enough of him and determined to leave him. I loved my three children but since my stepmother wasn’t kind to me I was forced to leave them with their father. I came and stayed again with my father. My stepmother was, I think, becoming older and began to treat me as her own daughter, or maybe I was wise enough to do everything for her, which was why she began to love me. I stayed with them for about two years until my husband brought our children and begged me to pardon him to stay with him again. He said that he would change his manners and that he would not drink again. Now he has really changed himself and we live together again. We are with our five children, bringing them up to become good boys and girls and to love one another.

My father died a few years after my husband and I started living together again. I couldn’t express how sad I was. I knew that I had lost my kind father and would never have him back again. I felt sorry for my stepmother, who had to go back to her own home.

My husband was once taken seriously ill and I really didn’t know what to do. I thought of my dear children and wondered if he died who would take care of us. But luckily he recovered and is looking after us.
There were seven of us in our family and I was the second youngest. There were four boys and three of us were girls. Our parents were very kind people and all of us liked them. We always came home and spoke with them and did whatever they would ask without delay. As I grew up I noticed these things and I asked them why the young people always liked to be with them, and my mother answered that if I grew up to be as kind-hearted as they were, people would love me too. They brought me up and taught me how to work and how to be a good person to my neighbours and anyone whom I might meet. At that time there was no school, so only our parents taught us how to behave ourselves. We all stayed with our parents and they took care of us until we were old enough to help them. Mother taught me how to work and I was always with her. Sometimes the adolescent girls came and we took strolls in the evening, but I never stayed with them until midnight.

Days came and went, but I continued to help my mother with her work. My two eldest brothers and two sisters got married and went to live in their wives’ and husbands’ homes, and that left the three youngest of us to look after our old parents. We stayed together and they all loved me—I was a real pet. I liked to be with the other young women, but I never went with them to the dances or to the cinema. Sometimes my brothers asked me if I wanted to go but I refused, because I just didn’t like going to either of them. I always stayed at home and asked my mother to tell me some legends about Rotuma, which I loved to hear.

Unluckily, there was an epidemic of dysentery over this island and we all got it except one of my unmarried brothers, and in a couple of days my father died. I was so sick that I wasn’t able to go and see my father’s funeral. My mother, too, was very sick and she didn’t even know who had
taken my father to the cemetery. When I recovered I thought of my father and began to cry, remembering his kindness to all of us, his children. He never used harsh words with us. Whenever he was angry with one of us, he just told us not to do that again. We really miss him.

When I was about 30 years old, a young man wanted to marry me, and he spoke to our village chief, and the chief came to my elder brother. My brother asked the chief to go back and wait, because he had to ask me first. My two brothers and my mother liked that boy, but for myself, I didn’t feel like leaving my mother. I thought of what it would be like if I got married to that boy and he wasn’t as good to me as my two brothers. Then we might get into trouble and I would live a sad life. I told them I didn’t want to get married. My brother went and told the chief.

After that, I knew I had to be good to my mother and brothers. I was still the same to them and have never done anything to make them angry at me. After a while my elder brother got married, and then the younger. The latter lives with his wife at her home, while the former stayed with us. My brother had four daughters and two sons, and I took care of them from their childhood up to now. My mother died when my brother had five children. I felt very sad but couldn’t help it, because there must be an end to every living creature on this earth. I wished she would have lived longer, to be with me all the time. Now I am very old, living with my brother and his children. They treat me so nicely that I live very happily with them, and I am in want of nothing.
Chapter 7

Men Born in the 1920s

(Age 39)

There were eight children in the family—five boys and three girls. I was the third eldest. I stayed with my parents for only a few months, and then my father’s sister took me with her to another district and she and her husband raised me. They had no children of their own. I thought they were my real parents until I was about 8 years old, when I finally learned that they had just adopted me. Sometimes after that I went to visit my real parents, but I found that my aunt and uncle treated me better. I guess that was because I had been separated from them for a long time, and besides that they had plenty of other children at home. For my aunt, I was an only child.

I started going to school when I was 6 years old. I think I was probably the worst boy in the school. One reason for that is probably because my adopted father was the chief, and I was used to having my own way. So I didn’t listen to the teachers, and if they would say anything to me I would just go home and they couldn’t touch me. At that time I know the people of that district didn’t like me much. The children my own age hated me because I was such a bully at the time. I stayed in school until I was 12 years old and had reached Class 4. I wasn’t very interested in the work and only did things because I was told to do them, so I didn’t do very well in school in Rotuma.

I went to Fiji with my adopted father to a Methodist Synod meeting in 1934 when I was 12 years old. While we were in Fiji, he put me in school at the Suva Methodist Boy’s School for the three-month period
he planned to stay, but when it came time for him to go back to Rotuma he asked me if I would like to stay on at the school and learn some more, and I agreed.

While I was going to school there, I stayed with a cousin of mine who was a teacher in the compound. I found life at this school different from anything I'd ever known. The boys didn't waste time there as much as they did in Rotuma. They studied seriously, and I had to study hard too if I wanted to keep up with the class. My cousin also did me a lot of good. He taught me many things, not by the third degree, but by logical methods that made me interested and eager to learn. I began to change my ways then and became interested in school. I began to pick up in school very well. During the first year I was in Class 5 and barely passed, coming in about 64th among about 70. Part of my trouble was with the language, because most of the teaching was in Fijian and English. The next year, though, in Class 6, I came in eighth in the class and earned the progressive prize for greatest advancement.

I stayed at this school for six years and got through Form IV. At the end of that year—1941—I took my qualifying exam and passed in everything except in Fijian, but because I was a Rotuman they awarded me a pass.

The following year the government was going to send me to the Teacher’s Training Institution at Davuilevu, but at the last minute I changed my mind. The headmaster sent me to Morris Hedstrom Ltd. to take a job in the shipping office. I stayed there for about a month, but almost every afternoon I would go to the police training depot and play ping-pong and cricket with the Rotuman fellows there. I became interested in the police department and decided to join. For one thing I was only getting 8/6 per week at MH, and since I didn’t have anyone to take care
of me I couldn’t get along very well on that, so I joined the police as a recruit on the 6th of February, 1942.

I trained as a recruit for three months and took the police examination and did so well they made me a second-class constable. I was assigned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Suva. I stayed with the CID for about two years and found it very interesting. I worked in the office most of the time, but went out sometimes. One thing, I think that working with fingerprints ruined my eyes, and I’ve had to wear glasses ever since.

After two years I was assigned to the Immigration and Licensing Department. I stayed there for about ten years up until 1954. I found the work hard, but interesting. One thing I didn’t like: besides our regular weekly hours we were on night call and sometimes on weekends.

The first time I returned to Rotuma was for a holiday in December 1946, when I was 24 years old. During the time I was here I renewed my acquaintance with a girl I had met in Fiji the year before. I met her several times during the maneʻa and I finally proposed. She agreed but said it was up to her parents. It so happened that her mother didn’t like me. She hated me like castor oil. She disliked me because she knew I was a bad boy when I was young and because she had heard that in Fiji I would go with one girl and then throw her over for another, and things like that; it was partly true. My adopted father went sok fācaga [formal marriage proposal] with kava but her mother refused. He went again with an apei [fine mat] to faksoro [in this context, to beseech] and this time my girlfriend and her father agreed, although her mother still refused, but the marriage plans were made. We got married very simply on a Sunday in church. After that we went and had a bite to eat at my wife’s house. My mother-in-law didn’t even shake hands with me. She didn’t want a formal wedding. We got
married in March and I took her to live at my house until June when we went to Fiji.

I enjoyed married life and it helped me a lot with my work. I didn’t roam around so much and got enough sleep so I was able to work properly. By the way, before leaving Rotuma I went again to faksoro my mother-in-law and this time she told me all her reasons why she had objected, but she accepted my faksoro and we became very good friends after that.

I resigned from the Immigration Department because of false promises and bad working conditions. I applied to the Colonial Secretary for a transfer, and in July 1954 I went to the Income Tax Department. I stayed there for two years, until June 1956, when I was transferred to administration, to which I had applied. I asked to be sent to Rotuma and was assigned to Rotuma as the clerk of the district. I felt I had served Fiji long enough and wanted to serve my own people for a change. Last year the job of sub-accountant was also transferred to the clerk, whereas before it had been done by the District Officer. I feel that the work I have to do now is far too much work for one man.

Now I have eight children of my own—five boys and three girls. I feel like I have a big responsibility in my children and worry about how I will be able to pay for their secondary school education. As far as I can tell now I’d like to stay in Rotuma. Before I retire I’d like to build a house for myself and my children. My biggest concern is that my children get a good education and a good job.
(Age 38)

My parents were always very kind to me and my brothers, and they got everything that we wanted if they could. They took real good care of us until we were able to take care of ourselves.

When I was 5 years old I went to school. I liked it very much because I got to know many children. In school I learned how to take good care of myself and how to become a good person. When I was 15 years old I stopped going to school and stayed home instead.

Beginning with the time that I was 12 years old, I felt very different about girls than when I was younger. After I stopped going to school, I began to go out to the girls every night. Most of the time I would go out with the other boys, but one night I met a girl that I really fell in love with. I went to her every night for about three months and I found out that she really loved me too.

During the time I was seeing this girl was the happiest time of my life. Every day I thought about her and it made me feel happy. It was easy for me to do hard jobs because I would think about her and feel happy, and it didn’t bother me when people would speak harshly to me because I knew she loved me and that was all that mattered to me. We saw each other like that for four years and finally we got married.

We were married for only three years and then we separated because after we were married we lived together with her parents, and her mother’s way was not good. She always treated me like a child and would always tell me what to do. I couldn’t stand it any more so I finally left my wife with her mother and father.

A few years later I got married again, and I found out that married life in Rotuma is not so bad if both our parents will be kind to us, or if we do not live together with them after we were married. When I got married
in 1948 I became a Methodist to be of the same religion as my wife. Changing my religion was not hard for me because I really loved my wife and besides, I like the Methodists.

I lived with my second wife in a house that was given to me by B.P.’s [Burns Philp] because I had the job of overseer. When I was made the overseer I found it hard at first, but I discovered that if you are a kind person and know your job well, it isn’t too difficult. I stayed at B.P.’s until 1953 when I stopped working for B.P.’s and moved to my wife’s home to become the faufisi [second-ranking chief] of the district and also a faʻes hoʻaga [head of a section of a district]. Later on I was made the chairman of the local co-op. Being a leader for all these things was different than when I was free because I had to think all the time about the welfare of the people. But I found it hard only in the beginning, and when I got used to it, it wasn’t too bad because I knew what to do and my only problem was telling the people to do it. Now I am living together with my wife and will do whatever the district chief says.
(Age 38)

We were only two brothers who grew up together and were brought up by our mother. My mother was a poor woman who lived with her father, our grandfather. She loved us and I knew she was doing her best to comfort us when we were crying in want of something. Sometimes I was curious to know who my father was, and she just told me that I hadn’t got a father. I roamed around and played with the other children, and when I saw their toys I really wanted some of my own but thought of my mother and just went away. I knew she wouldn’t be able to get some for us.

My elder brother loved me and whenever he came back from school we two played together. When I entered school we always went and came back together. I had a hard time in my first year in school, although I loved to learn. My grandfather was old and I knew it was a bit hard for him to support us in school so my brother had to stay home. Three years later I also had to leave school; at that time I was in Class 6. I still wanted to study but there wasn’t anybody to pay my school fees. Life was becoming harder for me because I knew I had to work and look after my mother and grandfather. I had to cut copra to earn money for us and sometimes became so tired that I went to sleep without supper. By the time I was 17 I got used to our native kind of work.

In the evenings I went with other adolescent boys taking strolls and playing cards or any game happening in the village. I met many adolescent girls but because my mother was so poor I didn’t feel like making friends with any of them. A few years later I told my mother that I would like to marry a girl whom I met and I thought she would be nice to her. In our native custom it is a hard thing for the boy’s parents if he wants to marry a girl. My mother told me about all the preparations required before a wedding but still I wanted to marry that girl because my mother
was getting very old and there wasn’t a woman in the family to take care of us. One night I went and brought the girl home. My mother was very angry with me and so were the girl’s parents.

I loved both my mother and my wife. At first my wife was very kind to my mother and helped her but everybody should know what it’s like to take care of an old woman. A few months passed and my wife began grumbling to me about my mother, but I took no notice. I told her that my mother was old and when she was wild with her to just go away and not face her. We stayed together for four years, but she didn’t take care of my mother properly, and when I thought of how kindly my mother had brought us up I made up my mind to send my wife back home.

I told my mother that if every girl in the world was of the same kind and character as my wife it would be better for me to stay single than to marry again. Poor mother had really had enough of her and didn’t say anything. My mother died soon afterwards and I felt very sad. I wondered if I would be able to find another wife who would be as kind as my mother. I went out in the evenings and met another girl whom I married afterwards. We loved each other and lived happily from the beginning after our wedding up to now. We haven’t got any children and yet I wish my mother were alive so she might see the difference between my first wife and the second wife. She’s really nice to me and even to the children of our neighbours. Everybody says that I was very lucky that I have a very kind wife but it’s really true.
(Age 35)

I am the fourth child in a family of seven children—five boys and two girls. We are from a good family and were rich, but the way our father treated us, it was as if we were beggars. Our parents were very kind to us when we were young children. Whatever we were in need of, they always provided. They were kind to us and to our relations.

When my two older brothers and sister went to school I was left at home with my mother, but most of the time I spent with my grandmother. I was living with my parents, but my grandmother took care of me and she was the one who brought me up. I became a lively child and many in the family hated me, with the exception of my grandmother who really didn’t want anybody to scold me, like my parents and others older than me. Sometimes I went out and played with other children, but I was bigger than my friends and used to fight with them, so their parents hated to see my face whenever I went to their homes.

When I reached the age of 6, I began to go to school with the others. It’s funny to think of that time because I really had no interest at all in school. So many days I just hid myself in the bushes near the end of the village waiting for the other children to return. Then I would accompany them as if I were coming back from school. Learning was a bit better for me, but I really hated to see teachers using sticks to punish the other children and sometimes me. Never once had my parents scolded or hit me so I hated anybody to raise a hand to me. School lessons were always the last thing for me, and as a result of neglecting my lessons I didn’t do well. So when I was 14 I left school and stayed home like a child of 2 years of age. My grandmother didn’t want my parents to scold me so I was able to do as I pleased.
When I was about 15, my grandmother gave me her oil so that I could help her do *sarae* [massage]. I later became a masseur and was using *rē ʻai* [magic], and many people came to me to be massaged. I also was called to go to people’s homes to do the same work. Whatever I did, whether good or bad, people were frightened to talk about it. At that time I never helped my father in his plantations or elsewhere; I just went roaming around on my bicycle from house to house doing the same work (massaging) every day.

One day I heard about people going to Fiji and I asked my father to send me there. He did, and after a few months I found myself walking up and down the Suva path. My father gave me enough money so that I would not have to work because he knew that people like me wouldn’t be able to get a good job in town. In Suva I met a lovely girl whom I loved and many times I tried to speak to her, but I didn’t know how to talk to girls. I finally got a chance one day and spoke to her. We began to know each other and at the end we were like a married couple. I really loved this girl and told her to wait so I could return home and tell my parents. I came home on the next boat and told my family about this and they all refused to accept it and gee! People should have seen my inner organs. How sorry I was to leave this girl behind; I should have brought her with me. I gradually forgot her because we could see each other no more. Then I met another girl but my parents still didn’t want me to get married and refused to accept her as well. I still kept seeing her using false pretences, but later rumours went around and the girl found out that my parents had refused her, so she left for Fiji. I felt so sorry for her because I knew we loved each other and planned for our future together, and yet we had to part because of my parents. I didn’t feel like talking to any girl by then because my parents were not so nice whenever I talked to them about.
marriage. Three years passed and I was still a loafer and never did any work or helped my father in his plantations.

About that time my mother became seriously ill with a sore on her knee and was taken to the hospital in Suva and had her foot cut off. I felt sorry for her because I knew she wouldn’t be able to do her work properly. Now she is walking with the help of two walking sticks and I know she feels the difference between now and before her foot was cut off.

I asked my father and he bought me a motorbike and I was like a famous man going around the island. A few months later, I met a third girl. I loved her and wondered if my parents would reject her as well. I knew that she loved me so we planned our future, but we guessed that my parents wouldn’t like her because she was of a different religion. Anyway, I took her home and we got married in a few weeks’ time. Then I began to settle down and started to work in the plantations for the first time because I knew I was going to have to provide for a family of my own. Working in the plantations was harder than I expected, but I managed to do it.

My wife was very kind to me and my parents and also to my grandmother. She knew that my mother was unable to walk properly and Granny was weak, so she took all the family work for herself. Now that I was married and wise enough to go into business, my father bought a little bus and began a bakery right near our home. I had so many friends who helped with the work, but everything was finished within nine months. My father was very angry with me, but he didn’t dare say anything because he would be knocked down by the blow that I would be able to give him. I was so spoilt that my parents and wife were not allowed to say something that would arouse my anger or else they had to find their way out. I thought I would never know how to be kind to anyone.
Now I am older and wiser and I realise how bad I have been to my parents and poor wife, who is staying home doing all the work. My wife and I have six children and I am trying very hard to work for my family, especially for my children. I do hope they don’t grow up spoilt like myself. I am now a driver for one of the R.C.A. [Rotuma Cooperative Association] lorries, hoping that my work will be of value for everyone in the family. It’s really hard trying to change myself to become a kind person to everyone, but I think I may be able to change things around and control my bad temper.
I am the fourth child out of a family of six children. I can still remember the kind treatment that our dear parents had given us. Our father was serious but kind and mother was the same to us every day.

I used to go out and play with my neighbour friends and sometimes came back very late in the evening, but my parents never scolded me. At that time I was too young to know what was good or bad and kept acting like that until my mother warned me that if I ever did it again she would give me a good stick on my legs, and I was so scared that I didn’t go out again without her permission.

I was sent to school when I was 6 years old. I loved to study, but most of the time laziness ruled so all the lessons were very hard for me. I tried my best to overcome my laziness and began to work hard to learn. During the first four years I was promoted from class to class. When I reached the age of 10, I entered boarding school where I spent seven years but didn’t succeed in my learning. I left school and went home to help my father who was then old and very feeble. After a few months my elder brother came back from Fiji and I took my chance and left Rotuma for Fiji. I spent a few months away from home but didn’t find any pleasure during the few months I spent in town. I came back to find my father in bed with not enough strength to walk around. Poor father died after a long illness. You can imagine how sorry I felt when my father died. He was really serious to others but kind to his children. After his funeral my mother left the village, which she was very used to along with the people, but went back to her home village. I went with her. I kept company with the other adolescent boys in the village and we went out every evening seeking pleasure for ourselves in other villages, as other young men used to
do. Later I met one of the girls whom I loved and told my mother about it and she didn’t reject it because she seemed to have the same will as mine.

A few months later my dreams came true. I got married to this girl and my mother and I went to live in her home. How different my life was from the time before I got married. Whenever I wished to go someplace I had to let my wife know first. She was so nice and kind to my mother, and so my mother seemed to love her more than I did. Everything seemed to change when our first child was born. It made me feel strange and to love my wife whenever my eyes came across my baby. We lived happily with our baby and my dear mother.

It happened one day that I was chosen by our relations to take the subchief’s title. I knew I was too young and not wise enough to lead many people, but I had to take it. Many a time my elders were wild with me but I didn’t care because they had chosen me to look after them. I was brave and very insolent to them and they seemed to hate me later.

A few years passed when a great suffering came upon me. One of my five children died a sudden death. He seemed to be poisoned by something. How sad I was to think of it, but it dawned on me that maybe it was a punishment given me for how I had treated the older people in our village. I changed myself then and became a new person towards my people, and now my wife and I are loved by our neighbours and are leading a happier life among the others in the village.
(Age 35)

The first time I can remember was when I was living with my parents; I was about 5 or 6 at the time. At that time I thought Rotuma was the only place in the world. I was the second oldest in the family and was brought up by my grandmother. I went to stay with her when I was about 7 years old. That’s when I started school. I lived with my grandmother and her two unmarried sons—they were around 20 or 22. At that time I was the only child in Rotuma who could do the Samoan knife dance, but I did it with a club. I taught myself by watching a fellow dance when the governor came to Rotuma. I remember dancing at a wedding.

My grandmother treated me very well. Anytime she ate something good, she wanted me to taste it. I was closer to my grandmother than to my own parents. She let me do almost whatever I wanted. But sometimes, if I did something wrong, she would make me kneel. I would feel ashamed at times like that—with the other children watching.

I went to school at Upu. I didn’t find school very difficult because I was very studious. One year we had an exhibition of handwriting and I took first prize in my age group. I boarded there for three years. We had to do work in the bush as well. At that time we were building the church at Upu and we helped there sometimes.

I can remember one time when we were out in the bush. It was the first time that I ever saw a dead man. He had been out in the bush and hadn’t come back all night, so we went to look for him. We found him lying dead. Some people said that he had been beaten up by devils. I knew the man pretty well because he used to plant right next to us. I couldn’t sleep that night. I was 10 years old at the time. I was frightened, and after that I didn’t want to go in the bush by myself to that place.
When I was 13 years old I went to Cawaci, near Levuka, on Ovalau. I went to the minor seminary; a brother who was Rotuman suggested that I become a priest. I was a bit more intelligent than the other boys. I liked the idea but my mother didn’t like it. She wasn’t sternly opposed to it, but she wasn’t very happy. She thought something might happen and I’d have to leave the priesthood later on. That happened to some of the lay brothers. That kind of thing is more shameful, I think, to the Rotumans than to Europeans. She also said that by the time I come back she’ll be dead, and she was right. My grandmother was dead by then.

When I got to Fiji I was sorry that I had gone. I felt terribly homesick. I thought I was better off in Rotuma; the food was more plentiful and the clothes were better; the Fijians went around without a shirt. In Fiji you had to be independent—wash your own clothes. We had practically no iini [meat, fish, eggs], and mostly just vati [leafy greens], but it was a mysterious thing to me that I became fat. I was very thankful to my parents—every time they sent a letter they sent me cash, ten shillings or so. One peculiar thing—in the ten years that I was away while my mother was alive, she never sent me a single letter, but my father told me that every letter he sent, she would read first. Another thing in school, I didn’t know what my future would be. It was very unsettled, but I was living among the Fijians, and I reckon the Fijians are a very kind-hearted people. I stayed in this school for seven years. We had to pass the Leaving School Certificate and the Qualifying Examinations, which permitted me to go to the training college, but since I was going to become a priest I stayed at the seminary and continued studying Latin, theology and catechism. I still found school easy for me.

After seven years I had to move to Namosau, in Mba. I spent two and a half years there. Life was even tougher there. They didn’t grow any
food there, so we had to buy everything; for ‘i‘ini we had to go to the river and search for kai, a kind of shellfish. Still at that time nothing was settled. Finally, at the end of that time I was told that I was going to be sent to St. Patrick’s college in Silverstream, near Wellington, in New Zealand. I was about 24 years old then. When I was told, I was delighted. I came to Rotuma for about two weeks after hearing that. Only once during my seven years at Cawaci did I return to Rotuma for a holiday. My mother had died in the meantime.

I can remember the day I learned my mother had died. I was a sacristan, preparing the altar for the Mass, when Father Foley called me out and told me the sad news that my mother had passed away. Everything looked bad to me. My mother was going to come to Fiji, but she got sick and died. I thought of what my mother had told me before I left—that when I would come back she probably would be dead. Of course, being a Christian I prayed a lot. It made it much worse to be away from home … it’s worse than if you’re among your own people. I lost interest in everything. I just did what others did, but with no life. For the first week I didn’t sleep well, didn’t eat well. I thought of how much my mother would have liked to see me as a priest, but now she had died. Even now I feel bad when I see someone with their mother. I really think that the best person in the world is your mother. Your brothers and sisters may be loyal to you, but your mother’s your own flesh. All the good I had in mind to do for her materially, I couldn’t do.

When I went to New Zealand I was worse off than when I went to Fiji. For one thing I found that the white people are more unsociable than the coloured people. That was mostly in the school itself, especially in the beginning. Some of the older people, the married ones, were very good to me and brought me to their homes. I stayed at Silverstream for two years.
It was supposed to be three years for matriculation, but after two years I got my school certificate and went to the seminary. Life in the seminary for seven years was a different life. There were times for silence and recollection. The Marist order is a religious order, professing three vows, instead of the two taken by secular priests. Besides the ordinary two vows of chastity and obedience, we had to take the vow for poverty. We did two years philosophy at Greenmeadows. I found philosophy very tough. This was the first time I found school really difficult. It was very abstract stuff. But I got through all right. In between the first and second years of philosophy, we did a year of noviciate at Highden. There was no study of philosophy. It was mainly to study the constitution of the Society of Mary. Mostly it was a life of prayers and silence. I found this year very discouraging. Sometimes I felt like packing my things and leaving. It was really supposed to be a trial—they’re trying you out. On the last day of that year we were professed and took our three vows.

After the first year of philosophy at Greenmeadows, the year of the noviciate, and the second year of philosophy, I started the theology course at Greenmeadows. I found it more interesting than philosophy. Seminary life is the best of all, because you don’t get any temptations. Your mind is mostly on what your exam questions are going to be. In all my seven years, they never told me my marks. Theology is a mystery because you can only understand part of it. You cannot understand the whole lot because of the limitations of the human mind. If there was something I didn’t understand, I was taught to take it on faith. But at the same time, they told me I should question more. I was naturally too reserved. I tried to do everything myself without asking—pride, I think.

If you asked me now, if you had it to do over again, would you become a priest, I’d have to think about it. It doesn’t mean I regret it, but
I’d have to think. The life and obligations are not easy. You’re not your own boss. I was anxious though to come back to Rotuma and work among my own people.

After I was ordained I spent three months in pastoral work in New Zealand. After that I was appointed for six weeks in North Auckland as an assistant priest, and after that I was sent back to Fiji. First I was appointed as assistant priest at Levuka for about two-and-a-half months, and then I was sent to Rotuma. I felt great about being sent to Rotuma. I have no desire to be posted anywhere else but here.

When I came back they had a big kato'aga [ceremonial feast] for me. I felt especially grateful to the Wesleyans—to go to all that trouble. I don’t think the Catholic people would do that for a Wesleyan minister who was returning.

I like being in Rotuma, but now I feel somewhat deficient. If I had another chance to study in New Zealand, I think I would do better. There are so many things I don’t know—music, for instance; I’m very interested in music. The most important thing for a priest is to be able to deal with the people. I think I still have a lot to learn about that. I think most of the time I’m too easy. But it’s better to have charity for the people. Maybe the trouble is that being a Rotuman I get too familiar with the people. I really should keep a certain distance, but I find it difficult to do it. Maybe it’s harder for a young fellow. The old people don’t like the priest to be too easy going—they like him to be a priest. It’s because they’re used to the French fathers, I think. The only trouble is, if you’re strict the people will be scared of you and stay away from you. However, I think the Rotuman children respect you even if you are familiar with them, unlike the Fijian children.
As a priest you can’t be perfectly happy, but when you come back from talking to people as a priest, you feel good because you’ve done something worthwhile. One shouldn’t be surprised if he isn’t perfectly happy, because God doesn’t intend you to be perfectly happy in this life.

In Rotuma we have two denominations, and in order to be successful you should treat them both equally. If the Wesleyans see that the priest is kind to them, they may feel more sympathetic to the Catholic church.

I also think the priest should be respectful to the chiefs. I think the French fathers were wrong in the way they treated the chiefs. After all, the people look up to the chiefs and if you want to get their cooperation, it’s better if the chiefs are favourably disposed towards you. Otherwise they just try to stay away.

I think a man goes on learning until he dies. I’ve done some things seriously wrong—about Rotuman custom—since I’ve returned to Rotuma. Like one time when I was riding on my bicycle past a *mamasa* [welcoming ceremony]. I went right past without slowing down. I felt very bad about that. It’s respectful to at least slow down, if not get off your bicycle and walk until you are past. That shows that you feel something about what’s happening, not like it doesn’t mean anything to you. The worst thing was that they stopped me near the end of the road and asked me to join them and eat; I really felt ashamed. In New Zealand they might say that is silly, but in Rotuma it’s the accepted thing and I think it’s proper to follow the custom. I wouldn’t do anything like that again. I think that some of the Rotumans who get educated ignore the proper customs of etiquette and I think the old Rotuman customs should be kept.
(Age 35)

I lived together with my parents and brothers and sisters. Although my mother and father were very poor, they always did their best to look after us, and I can remember that they were very kind. That was a happy time for me when I was living at home. I would play with my brothers and sisters every day, and we really loved each other very much. When I was about 19 years old, I took a trip to Fiji and left my family in Rotuma. I got quickly discouraged though, and any time that I wasn’t doing something to keep myself busy, I would think of my brothers and sisters and the way we had lived together. Thinking of them made me want to come back to Rotuma. After I was in Fiji for six months, I gave up and decided to come back home.

After I came back home, I started to go out with my friends every night, and finally I met a girl and fell in love with her. I wanted to marry her and told my mother and father about it, but they didn’t like the idea because they said her ways were not so good. So I gave up that girl and looked for another one. I finally found one and got married to her.

A year after I was married my father died, leaving only myself, my mother and younger brothers. My older brother had already gotten married and moved to his wife’s home. So when my father died I was the only one left to look after my mother and brothers. I was only 22 years old at the time. After my father died I felt very bad. We were very poor and it seemed like such a big burden for me to look after my mother and brothers properly. Nearly every night I would lie awake thinking of the next day and try to plan ahead. I would think of the time when my father was still living and sometimes I felt so discouraged that I thought I was going to die. That was the most unhappy time of my life.
One day one of my brothers died, and I thought about him for three years before I was able to forget him. I continued to look after my brothers until they were all married, leaving only my mother, my wife and I. My wife and I now have eight children. But I am still living very poorly.

I don’t want to be a fa es hoʻaga, but I do it because I love my mother. This hoʻaga came from her side and by taking it I’ll always be able to remember her, even after she has died. We are living very poorly like this just because when we were small the schools in Rotuma were no good, so we didn’t learn anything.
(Age 34)

The first time I can remember is when I was about 5 years old. At that time I lived with my mother and father, brothers and sisters, and my father’s cousins. I think our family was the biggest one in our district at that time. There were about fifteen people including me. From the time I was 5 years old until I was around 13, life was very easy for me. That was because there were many people in our family to work, and they said I was only a child and they didn’t try to get me to work. Nobody told me what to do and I always did as I wanted.

My mother and father sent me to school when I was 6 years old. I liked school very much, because I made many friends and we used to play together every day. During that time I know I was a very bad boy. That was because my father and mother had always let me do anything that I wanted, so I didn’t care about anyone. When I was in school I used to play all the time, but I didn’t want to listen to what the teacher was saying. Sometimes the teacher had to force me to stop playing and sit down. Every day, after school, I used to destroy other people’s property—things like flowers that people had planted near their houses.

When I became an adolescent, I was still the same way. Sometimes I wanted to eat something that didn’t belong to me or our family, but I’d take it anyway. The people were always angry at me and said that I was a bad boy, but as far as I was concerned it was good fun. I knew what I was doing was very bad, but I kept on doing it because I thought it was fun.

When I was about 19 years old I went to Fiji and joined the army. I liked being in the army very much; it was more fun than the time that I was in Rotuma. In the army I was always with my friends and sometimes we all got drunk together and sang songs, and other times we got drunk and we all would go to a dance together.
After being in the army for nearly two years I decided to return to Rotuma in time for the Christmas holidays. I came back home and saw my mother and father again, and we all spent a very happy Christmas together. Every night I used to go with my friends to the beach games, and one night I met a girl. I looked at her and loved her right away. I liked the way she talked and the way she acted, so every night during that Christmas holiday I went to be with her. One night she asked me whether I really loved her or not, and I answered by telling her I loved her with all my heart and soul. After having been with her every night during the playtime (mane'a), my mind was made up and I didn’t care about anything else, only her. I thought of her every day and when I left her, I counted the hours and minutes until I would meet her again the next night. On the last night of the holiday season I listened to the way she talked to me and I knew that she really loved me.

One night I went to her and we talked the whole night, and I slept there and the next day I stayed at her home, fuʻu [literally, “to stay”; an informal type of marital commitment]. Soon after that we were married. I lived with her in her home for about two years and then we moved to my mother’s home. I liked married life from the beginning. Living with the one I loved made me very happy. It also made me happy to have children and I like living with my family.

Unluckily, starting in 1954 until today, I have suffered from filariasis and filarial fever. Having a family to take care of makes it even harder for me. But I think now that the reason I’m sick is because of the way I used to act when I was a youth—always destroying things. I think I’m being punished by God for all the bad things I did when I was younger. I’ll never treat my own sons the way my mother and father treated me, letting me do whatever I wanted without ever punishing me.
(Age 31)
The first time I can remember is when I was living with my mother, father and brother. I was older than my brother. My mother and father were very kind to us and we always got what we wanted because we were the only two children. We really loved each other very much. They also gave us much freedom, and it was easy to do what we wanted.

When I was 6 years old my parents sent me to school. I can remember going to school with my friends, and on our way we would play on the road and were very happy. I liked school at first because I got to know a lot of children I didn’t know before and made friends with them; we got to love each other just like brothers and sisters. Also in school we learned how to do things and I liked that too. Before I went to school I didn’t know anything, but in school I learned how to protect my body from sickness, and I learned how to cure myself if I got sick.

When I was around 13 years old I started to go out with the other boys at night. After going out with them for a few weeks I changed my mind about school and began to hate it. I wanted to go out with the boys instead. So when I was 14 years old I told my father that I didn’t want to go to school and asked him if I could stay home. I told him that I wasn’t really learning anything in school and that he was just wasting his money by sending me, and that it would be better if I could stay home and help him with his plantations.

Dad agreed that I could stop going to school if I wanted, so I stayed home and helped him. I went with him to the bush during the day, but in the night I always went with the boys and looked for fun. I was happy to be out of school, because I didn’t have anything to worry about. When I was in school the teacher would give us homework, and I would worry, because I knew that if I didn’t do my homework, or made too many
mistakes, the teacher would punish me. After I stopped going to school, life seemed much easier and I didn’t worry about anything. Sometimes when I went out with the boys at night we used to joke with the girls. It made me feel happy to be near the girls and joke with them.

I stayed like this until I was about 18 years old, having a good time with the adolescent boys and girls in my village. After that some of my friends went to Fiji, and I felt that I would like to go too because I knew I would miss them and wouldn’t be happy. I asked my father to sent me to Fiji and he did, when I was about 19 years old.

After I was in Fiji for a while, I got a job as a sailor on an overseas boat. I sailed to some big places, like Australia and America. There I saw the most wonderful things I had ever seen in my whole life. On my first visit to one of those countries I couldn’t believe it. It was so wonderful that I thought I might be coming to enter heaven. The moving of the lights and the colours were fantastic. The first trip I was afraid, but when I got used to it I liked it very much. I saw plenty of beautiful and exciting things and for a while I couldn’t think of anything else. I think that when I was sailing it was the happiest time of my life. When you’re a sailor you can see plenty of new and exciting things. I also saw the most beautiful girls that I had ever seen. Some of them were so beautiful that when I saw their faces I couldn’t believe they were real people.

After I had been sailing for a few years I got a note from my mother. I started to read it and in the first line I read that my father had died. I dropped the note and started to cry and couldn’t finish the letter. I thought about the time I was with my father and knew that I would really miss him. On that day I couldn’t do anything—just look at the sky and cry and think of him, knowing I would never see him again.
Soon after that I gave up sailing and came back home to take care of my mother because I knew she was the only one left and there was no one else who would look after her properly. After I came home I decided it would be better to get married, because I had already seen all the things I wanted to see when I was a sailor. So in 1955 I got married.

I like married life very much, and I am taking care of my wife, mother, and two children. I don’t think of anything else except taking care of them now, because I’ve already seen what I’ve wanted. I’ll stay here in Rotuma looking after my wife and children until God takes me away from the world. I think it’s good for a Rotuman boy to sail for a while and see some of the world before coming back home to settle down.
(Age 31)

I lived together with my parents and two sisters; I was the oldest of the children. Between the ages of 3 and 5 years old, I always used to go and play with the children who lived next to us. Sometimes, if I went too far from home, my mother would punish me when I came back home.

When I was 6 years old my mother and father sent me to school and I liked it very much because I could leave home with the children and not come back home until the afternoon, but my parents would never punish me for it. Every night when I went to bed I would think about the next day—hoping it would come quickly so that I could be with my friends again. I liked very much to be with the other children every day because it was so much fun to play together. Sometimes I didn’t eat my lunch in school because I spent the lunchtime playing without stopping to eat.

When I was 10 years old my father wanted me to board at school so I did. About a year after that my father died and I felt very sad for a long time. It was about two years before I really felt better. I liked boarding school at the beginning, but after a couple of years I didn’t like it any more because there wasn’t much food to eat. So one day I ran home to my mother. She told me to go back to school, but I told her that I give up. My mother got married again and I stayed with her and her husband. Every day I used to go with him to the bush and I felt very comfortable working with him. My stepfather used to let me do anything that I wanted, sometimes I would go with my friends to the bush and didn’t do any work—only play.

When I was 16 years old, I left my mother and her husband and came to live with my auntie in another district. She was very kind to me in every way, but I found out that it was different than living with my real mother. When I was with my mother, I could do anything I wanted
without asking, but when I lived with my aunt I was afraid to do as I pleased without asking her first. That’s because she was my auntie and not my mother. The way I talked to her was different than the way I would talk with my mother. When I talked with my mother I didn’t show respect, but when I talked with my aunt I had to be respectful. Also, I was able to joke with my mother, but I was afraid to joke with my auntie.

When I was 21 years old I got married, and at the beginning I didn’t like it as much as when I was single because I was used to going out in the night instead of staying home. After I got married I always had to stay home with my wife. That was something new for me and I didn’t like it. After we had our first two children, I got used to staying home and by that time I liked married life. I wouldn’t like to live like I did when I was single again. I love my children and I don’t like to leave them. I want to be with them all the time.
(Age 31)

I was the eldest of eight children. The first things I can remember is when I was about 5 years old. At that time there was only my brother, who was about 3, and myself. My parents were very much devoted to me. I can remember very little strapping when I was young, even if I did mischievous things. We bullied boys much younger than ourselves but were never punished for it like other children. If you don’t strap your child for bullying a neighbour’s child, it’s likely to result in a misunderstanding with the neighbours, but that was seldom done to me.

I went to school when I was 6. I was so attached to my mother that very often after I first started school I would run back home. After I got adjusted to going to school—maybe after about two months—things got better. I wasn’t very active as far as joining the other boys in running around and playing games. As far as I can remember I did well in my first year. The teacher wasn’t very conscientious, maybe because of the poor pay. He used to give us our lessons and then go off fishing or something. We all feared him, because when he came back to class after going fishing, if he found that the children didn’t do their work properly, he strapped them. He was a domineering type.

Just before the end of this first year in school, in 1936, my parents moved to Davuilevu, near Suva. My father was sent there by the Methodist Church to undergo a theological course. I entered the Davuilevu primary school. I found school quite different there than what I had experienced in Rotuma, perhaps because the teachers there were mission teachers and had a very friendly approach to teaching. They were very understanding. One was a European lady and the rest were Fijian teachers. I was placed in the first grade, under the care of a male Fijian teacher, and I found him very much to my liking. I spent six years at this
school. For the first three years I stayed with my parents and there were very few changes because I could always go home after school. The main drawback during this time was language, because teaching was mostly in Fijian. Once I mastered the language, which didn’t take very long, I found my way about in school and with other children in the community. I didn’t do very well in the lower classes. The highest I ever got to was fourth place (out of thirty-two) in Class 5.

At the end of 1939 my parents returned to Rotuma, after my father completed his course. I was left to live with Rotuman boys. They had a separate hostel there, more or less organised by Wilson Inia. Then I realised the change. I suppose my life seemed empty with both my parents gone. But since the boys were all Rotumans, and Wilson was there to look after us, it didn’t take me long to adjust—about a month or two. The new “family” was quite an interesting one. There were twenty-one of us, and we had a head boy (prefect) and we had to plant to feed ourselves, apart from the money our parents used to send over. This money was kept by Inia. Organisation was very good at that time. We were well looked after. He was very careful about how our money was used and he made sure that none of the boys ran out of money; once a boy would run out, he would inform their parents and get them to send more. We looked upon him as someone who represented our parents, especially in a far away country.

Life in that little dormitory was very well organised. We used to work on the plantation very early in the morning, from six to half-past seven, and then go to school after that. After school, at 3 o’clock, we would go back home and again go to the plantation from 4 to 5 o’clock. After that we would shower and have our dinner. In the evenings we had study time, which was compulsory, from around 7 to 9 o’clock. That was the
schedule on Mondays through Fridays. On Saturdays we washed our clothes and maybe went to the movies if we had funds. On Sunday we went to church and Sunday school. I liked going to church and Sunday school then. I lived with these boys for two years like this.

At the end of 1940, Wilson went to a conference in India, and we were left on our own. Things became very badly disorganised then, particularly the financial side. There was no one to look after it. Each boy had to look after his own. Wilson returned in 1941, but unfortunately he got sick and was laid up in the hospital. When he recovered he went to Rotuma for a holiday, and because of the disorganisation most of the boys left, but I stayed along with three others. Eighteen of the boys left and went to look for jobs. I was too young to go and look for a job then. I was thinking that I would wait until the following year—1942—and would go to Suva then and try to see what I could do about a job.

But in 1942, fortunately, one of my uncles came to Davuilevu to take the theological course, and my parents suggested that I stay with him and his wife. I noticed a great change in life from the hostel to this family. He was rather harsh in his ways, and I found life very hard living with him because I had to work hard, doing planting and hard jobs to please him. I stayed with them for the whole of 1942, and in 1943 another uncle of mine, who was a schoolteacher, came over to Fiji to teach in a nearby school, so my parents suggested that I go and stay with him. Although I found it hard, life was more or less organised living with this uncle. I had to travel three miles to school every day. One thing I liked about staying with him was that I was back again into an organised life, more or less like when Wilson was at the hostel. Besides, there were two other chaps of my age living with them. Although my uncle was a strict disciplinarian, there
were three of us to share the punishment, so it was not so bad. In fact I was quite happy living with them.

Towards the end of 1943, when I was in Class 7B, my uncle suggested that I go and board at the school. At first I wasn’t very keen on the idea, because I would be the only Rotuman there. The others were mostly Fijian. I would have been the first Rotuman to board there. But my uncle thought it would be better for my studies. I was doing quite well in school, but the traveling tired me out and I often went to bed early without doing any reading. So in 1944 I left to board in this school.

In spite of the previous experience I had had living with the Rotuman boys, I found this very different, and much to my dislike. There were several reasons—first, I suppose, because of the complete Fijian society, and the hard manual labour we had to do. Most important of all was because by then I had an attraction for Suva, and I realised I had a few very close relations in Suva whom I could live with. I was about 15 years old at the time. Another thing that drew me to Suva was the fact that the Rotuman labour corps was doing war work there at the time, so there was a large Rotuman community there, most of whom were boys roughly about my age or a little older.

During that year of boarding, I began to spend quite a bit of my time in Suva, especially during the weekends. I very much wanted to go to Suva then, but I stayed on in school for the remainder of the year. During one period though, for about two weeks, I went away from school and tried to get a job, but I couldn’t find one. I even tried to enter the army, but was told I was too young, so I had to go back to school. In spite of all this leaving school and going to Suva, I came in second in my class in 1944, and the headmaster was holding me as sort of a prospect for the Fijian Qualifying Examination (FQE), which I would take after the
following year. I wanted to leave school, but the headmaster talked me into staying for the next year—after Class 8—in order to sit for the exam. At that time the FQE was very highly regarded in Fiji because it was the only exam they had. After passing that, you could become a trainee for almost any job in Fiji—go to the medical school, get a government job, etc. So I stayed in boarding school for the next year.

I didn’t do much that year by way of school work. I spent most of my time in Suva and created so much of a problem—staying out of school for weeks at a time—that the headmaster finally decided not to let me sit for the examination. I was almost on the point of leaving school of my own accord when, towards the end of 1945, my uncle, the teacher, was transferred to my school. He had heard of all the reports and threatened to send me back to Rotuma if I was to leave school. I dreaded that, and decided to stay in school for another year. I had to stay back in Class 8 for another year. I concentrated on my work and was selected to sit the Qualifying Examination. I passed the exam at the end of 1946. After I passed the exam I went right to Suva, before school closed down, and got a job. I didn’t know I had passed and was awaiting the result. I got a job sorting mail in the post office. I worked there for two weeks and quit because I didn’t like it, so I got a job as an office boy in a legal firm. I didn’t like that job much, either. I would have stayed there, but three weeks after I had joined that firm I learned that I had passed the exam, and I decided to go into the Nasinu Training College and become a teacher.

I always wanted to become a teacher. The first impression that I wanted to be a teacher was one day when I about 8 or 9 years old and I saw Ratu Edward Cakabou. He was a visiting teacher then. I was more or less attracted by the man’s personal appearance, and I thought that if I
were to become a teacher I might one day get a job like his, which was very highly regarded. He was highly respected, largely because of his royal blood. I was unaware of that, though, and thought the great homage paid to him was because of his position, and that anyone who got to such a position would be treated likewise. Secondly, because through my long years in school I had come across many kinds of teachers and I felt that I could join the competition and be a good one.

At the beginning of 1947, I went to Nasinu. I found the life there very much to my liking, perhaps because I was living with people of my own age. I also had the pleasure of knowing that I was pursuing something that would someday make a difference between me and a typical Rotuman. The longer I stayed there the more interested I became in the teaching profession. Because of that I settled down to work and did rather well. At the end of the two-year course I made up my mind to come to Rotuma first thing, and at the end of 1947 I was appointed to the Malhaha school. I stayed at the Malhaha school, teaching Class 6 most of the time, until 1953 when I was temporarily transferred to the Motusa school. Towards the end of 1953 I returned to the Malhaha school—the new one which had just been built. I taught Class 6 until the end of 1954, when I took over Class 7. At the end of 1955 I was awarded the Rotuma Development Fund Scholarship to take teacher’s training in New Zealand.

When I had returned back to Rotuma in 1948, I was at a loss with regard to Rotuman customs, because of the long years away. I had been away for more than twelve years and hadn’t returned home during that time. When I returned I had to undergo a long period of adaptation to Rotuman society. I didn’t seem to like the company of the adolescent boys much because of the way they went around, so I kept pretty much to myself. It took me just about the whole of 1949, but I adapted and became
a Rotuman myself. I took up the ways of the youth and became very active in most of the social undertakings of the adolescent boys.

In Fiji my only relationship with girls was of a social type—like school socials. At first I tried to be straightforward with the girls in Rotuma, but that was not the practice. So I quickly changed over to their methods of approach. Late in 1950, I got attracted to one of the girls. This girl had been in Fiji for a while and she was somewhat straightforward—the Fijian style, I suppose. There was no real courtship at all. We met in secret three times and consequently, on the third meeting, she came to my place with me. My parents didn’t like it, since my father was holding an office in the Methodist Church here and she was a Catholic. I suppose because of religious reasons and decency, they agreed to let us get married, and so we were properly married in the Methodist Church. Her father was dead then, and her mother didn’t have much choice in the matter.

The marriage was rather a broken one—we were more often separated than living together. My assumption is that the girl’s mother was strongly urging her daughter to go back to the Catholic church. I think she was more or less convinced that would be the right thing to do, and she tried to win me over to her side. I was not prepared to make a change, nor were my parents and my close relations. She started going to her mother and staying there for long periods, which, I suppose, gave me too much opportunity to flirt around with Methodist girls from my side. Now and again she would return but things never got any better. And on the last occasion when she went home, in 1954, we separated for good. We got officially divorced after I returned from New Zealand. I had two children by this woman—both boys. I have the youngest with me—he’s 6 years old, and she has the oldest—he’s 8 years old. When she went away for the final time, she was carrying the youngest one, and I didn’t make any attempt to
claim the child because most of my relations thought it would be bad for the children making a tug-o-war over them. Nothing more was said about our marriage until I returned from New Zealand. The court decision was for each of us to have one son, and ordinarily, according to Rotuman custom, I should have gotten the eldest one, but she had already sent him to Fiji to stay with her sister, so I took the youngest one.

I left for New Zealand in 1956. It took me almost six months to adapt myself—particularly to the social life there. The college I went to was co-educational and residential. Social life there was very high—very advanced in comparison to what I had experienced in Rotuma. Here, there are a lot of restrictions between boys and girls, but there, there was almost complete freedom. I liked it from the beginning, but several things kept me out of the scene. One was that I was conscious all the time that I had been sent by the Rotuman people and I felt obliged to accomplish something and bring it back to them. My main aim was to succeed in my studies. The other thing that kept me out of the social life for the first six months was the attitude of the Europeans in Fiji and Rotuma for the natives. I felt inferior and was very reluctant to take an active part in the social life. But this inferior feeling gradually wore off and I began to make friends and got to know most of the students. I found that there was in fact very little feeling of colour superiority among the European students and the faculty. After the first six months I was very well adapted—too well adapted in fact.

I think that one of the things that made me popular there was the part I played in college sports. They’re not quite like the Americans, but they’re quite keen in sports. I played rugby as one of the first fifteen (first team varsity); participated in track and field—I threw the shotput, javelin and discus; I played soccer on the first eleven, and finally became a
representative player for the South Auckland County provincial team. I began to take a very lively part in most of the social functions there. I went to nearly all the social dances and joined several college groups. At first I was very reluctant to partake in dating, but I was more or less encouraged by the friendly response of the girls. To be honest, when I started dating I was still conscious of the fact that I was different. I was always sure that a boyfriend of mine and his date were along. Soon I got used to dating on my own and my self-consciousness died out. In fact I got really used to dating, and perhaps I overdid it. I felt that it was an honour and a privilege to go around with European girls, since it was something that was not practiced here in Fiji. But even then I felt that it was just a temporary sort of thing. I was never convinced that any of these girls would ever be willing to lead an island life, so I felt that there was no sense proceeding with a romantic affair where one finds it hard to turn back. For me it was just like playing a game. There were times when girls got infatuated and mistook it for love. Maybe it’s because they were young—only around 19 or 20. I made sure to tell them the facts about island life and made it clear to them that it was hopeless—that they could never be happy in an island life. I considered staying in New Zealand to get an advanced teacher’s certificate, but I never considered staying there permanently.

In school, those subjects concerned with education I found to my liking from the beginning and I did well in them. I also took courses in art, science and English during the first year. The only thing I really found tough was English. I finished the two-year program and received the certificate. After completing these two years in New Zealand, I returned to Fiji. That was in 1957. In 1958 I taught Form III in a school for Fijian boys in Lodoni, Fiji. In 1959 I returned to Rotuma and have taught at the Malhaha school—Form IV—since then.
I think the part that influenced my attitude toward life most was the two years I spent in New Zealand. In New Zealand I found much more freedom than in Rotuma. When they say things in New Zealand, they have very little concern for the opinions of others, and people feel free to express themselves. In Rotuma the teacher is the source of education—and it is the same in Fiji. I became a very independent thinking person, although that has slowly been counteracted by my staying here in Rotuma. I feel that the longer I stay here the less independent I’ll become.
Rotuman Life Experiences, 1890–1960

(Age 31)

I lived with my father and mother and my sisters and brothers. When I was a small boy, I was very happy because my father was a catechist and I was always moving from village to village and district to district. I had plenty of friends and girlfriends all over the island. We then moved to one place and stayed there to live. I was very unhappy when we stayed there because I liked to go from place to place. Then my father died when I was about 13 years old. After my father died we started to live very poorly. I thought about my father for five years, because he was a kind man to us and gave us whatever we wanted. I felt bad because if I wanted something I could not get it and I was too young to work for it. That’s why I thought about him for so long.

When I was 18 or 19 and could work to get money, I started living happily again. I started trying to make girlfriends and my life became very happy. Then I found out that it’s better to get married because I was getting old and I needed somebody to take care of my clothes and food. When I was young, sometimes I would come home and would have to cook my food because my mother was busy. Then I got married and found out that married life was the best because I had somebody to look after my needs.

Now I’m chief of a district and it’s the first time in my life I feel really bad. Being a chief is hard and I’m very unhappy. The night that I found out I was the new chief, four days from then I could still not remember and think about what I was doing—just like I had no brain.

One day I went to the bush to weed my garden and left my knife stuck in a tree. I didn’t feel like working so I just prepared my food and when I finished I couldn’t remember where my knife was.
Now I’ve been chief for three weeks and still have trouble thinking and I worry too much. It’s better to live like I did before than to be chief. If you’re a good chief the people will all like you, but if you are a bad chief they will hate you. I’m worried about whether I’ll be a good chief or not; a worried life is no good.
(Age 31)

I’ll begin to tell the story of my life from the time I was 6 years old. I had four half-sisters and two half-brothers, and I was the only child from my parents. They loved me very dearly and gave me anything that I asked for and did anything that I wanted them to do. I felt that they loved me more than my half-brothers and half-sisters. The way my parents treated them was very different from the way they treated me.

We lived apart from the villages; I had no children to play with, so I would always follow my father to his plantation in the bush. While he was working, I used to play by myself in the bush. Sometimes I wouldn’t go with my father to his plantation but would stay at home. My favourite game was to build toy sailing boats and take them down to the sea and sail them all by myself. I was very happy during my childhood days, with nothing in mind but sailing boats.

Before I was 7 years old, I entered the Malhaha District School. My first day in school I was very sad. I was thinking about my sailing boats. I was not used to having a lot of kids to play with—I was used to playing by myself. After school I came back home and my father asked me if I liked school. I said with my lips, “Yes,” but in my mind, “No.” I already hated school on the first day. About three months later, Christmas time arrived, and I was very happy because there would be holidays and I wouldn’t have to go to school again until the next year.

After Christmas I went back to school again and was very unhappy. I still hated kids. I was used to being with no other kids to order me around. So from this time on I started to be a bad boy. I was going to school with my half-sister, who was 16 years old. She always took my side in school. I didn’t learn anything but how to fight. Starting from this year, nobody in my village liked me. Even now, if you ask anybody whether I
was a good kid or not, they’ll tell you! As soon as people saw me playing with their kids or coming near their house, they would chase me away.

When I was 8 years old, my half-sister and I went to Suva to stay with my brother and his wife, who had gone to Suva during Christmas time. My brother’s wife was Catholic, and they liked the idea that I should go to the Brother’s School [a Catholic mission school]. This was the time that I started to learn some English. I was only nine months in school, and then Master [Wilson] Inia came back from Australia and took me to the Methodist mission school at Davuilevu, twelve miles outside of Suva. At this time, I started to love school because I had a little bit of knowledge in my mind.

I was second in my Class 3 exams, and first in my Class 4 exams. I went into Class 5 in the same year. I remained in each class for only a half-year, coming in first each time, until Class 8. When I was in Class 4, my parents came to Suva because they loved me very dearly. My father would come to Davuilevu every Saturday and give me about a pound to spend. I started to go to movies then by sneaking out of school. As soon as I started to go to the movies, my work began to suffer, and I always thought of what I had seen. In Class 8, I went to the hospital for three months to be treated for sores on my legs and spent three more months at home. Then I told my father I wanted to go to agricultural school, but after nine months there I ran away.

Then while I was staying with my father in Suva, I met an American sergeant one day, in 1941 or 1942, who asked me if I could find him a girl for the night. I found him a Samoan girl who lived in our apartment house, and he tried to pay me for my service. I refused, but I asked him if he could find me a job, so he told me to wait for him at 8 o’clock the following morning. Then he drove away with this girl in his
jeep. The next morning, my father got up early to go fishing, and instead of going off to school, I waited for the American. He came by just after 8 o’clock and told me to get in his jeep. I thought we would be stopping at the American base at Samabula, but after he drove past Samabula I asked him where we were going. He said that he was stationed at Nadi and he was taking me to be his assistant. I began to feel a little bit afraid.

My father, in the meantime, had checked with the administrators at Davuilevu and discovered that I had not come there. He reported me missing to the police and posters with my picture were distributed all over the island. Within a week, the police came to the American base at Nadi and asked for me. The sergeant and I went back to Suva, and we arranged properly with my father for me to go work for him at Nadi. For the next eight years or so, I worked for this sergeant, whose job was to check American mechanical equipment throughout the Pacific. We went to the Gilberts, Carolines, Marshalls, Samoa, and Hawai‘i, and even as far as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. At the end of this time I was a technical sergeant myself.

Then one day my boss told me that he was going to the Carolines to be discharged, and at this same time there was a demand for a person who could take care of some outboard motors and other mechanical equipment and who could speak a little bit of Gilbertese, to conduct a scientific expedition to the Gilbert group. My boss suggested that I go with them and then rejoin him in the Marshalls and we would go “home” to America together.

I spent several months with the expedition in the Gilberts, and when they were preparing to leave, I told the expedition leader that I was staying on. He tried to persuade me to go, realising that there was a woman involved, but I refused. So they left without me.
This girl and I ran away together and stayed at the Mission house. Her parents, and the parents of her fiancé, who had gone to another island in the group, made magic to break up our relationship. One day we had a fight about my fountain pen, something very trivial, and she went away. Then I made magic at her, and now she is crippled and will never be able to get a husband. If I should go back and touch her or talk to her, she would recover, but she’s crippled now.

Then I ran away with another girl on a boat to Suva, and when we got to the Suva we discovered that I didn’t have a landing permit for her. She was forced to stay on the boat for two days, while the matter was deliberated by the Fiji administration. I wasn’t married to this girl, and the ruling was that she would be allowed to land, but if we weren’t married within a month, I would have to go to jail for six months and she would be sent back to her island. That is why we got married. If it weren’t for that, I would never marry.
I am the youngest of four children. The first thing I can remember is going to a wedding. I was about 3 years old at the time. I used to sleep with my mother when I was young. It’s a custom in Rotuma for young children to sleep with their mother until they go to school, or until there’s another baby. Since I was the youngest, I slept with her until I went to school. I was breast fed until I was nearly 3 years old.

I started school when I was 5, one year before I was supposed to. My older brother was in school and I wanted to go, so my mother said all right. The first year I wasn’t on the school roll. The first year I think I liked it, but towards the second, third and fourth years I hated school, but then I couldn’t leave. I hated reading because of the way it was taught—by the letter-sound method. I was pretty good at numbers, but most of the work in the lower grades had to do with reading. Another thing was the kinds of “torture” the teachers would impose. If we didn’t know our spelling lesson, for instance, the teacher would have the boy next to you pull your ears, and you would pull his if he didn’t know his lesson.

Because of being the youngest, I was a pet in the family. They treated me more or less like a grandchild. When I was 6, my next oldest brother was 16. If anything ever happened between me and my brothers, my parents would always shield me from them. If we had a fish that wasn’t enough for all, I looked upon it as my due. Of course mother and father would agree. If they went to a party or wedding, I expected to be taken along. If my older brother or sister asked me to go to the store for something, and I was too lazy to go, I wouldn’t, because my mother and father wouldn’t make me go and they couldn’t force me. Sometimes they would disagree, like if Dad would like me to go to the bush with him, but Mom didn’t want me to because of the mosquitoes and being afraid I
might get hurt. Sometimes I would run away and join him, and I would come back in the evening clinging to Father, because Mom might give me a whack. It was Dad who would reconcile things. Sometimes it was the other way around, if I would go with Mom when Dad didn’t want me to go. If one of them wanted to punish me for something, I would run to the other and they would protect me. It was very seldom that both of them wanted to punish me. The only times that would happen is when I would go off with my friends and stay away until after dark, and they would have to come searching for me.

I never was pals with my brother and sisters because of the age difference. My eldest sister was fifteen years my senior, the next sister was twelve years, and my brother ten years. It was very seldom that I was with them for any length of time. I was mostly with Mom and Dad. They didn’t regard me much like a brother. They regarded me as belonging to Mom and Dad and not to them. Sometimes one of them would have to stay with me while the others went out to work. I always chose my eldest sister, because she was the only one who didn’t tease me. My other sister used to pretend she was going to leave me and I had to chase her around the house.

One other reason I was never happy in school in the early grades was because I was always in the bottom of the class, because I was a year younger than the other kids, and besides I was very naughty. I was one of those little bullies. My uncle lived right next to the school and he was a subchief; I could run to his house and if I wanted to I could swear at everyone and they couldn’t touch me. Besides being at the bottom of the class, my elder siblings used to say that I wasn’t any good and wasn’t getting anywhere. In the 4th grade I repeated the year and that gave me a chance to catch up, and from then on I held my own. I had two years in
the 5th grade because that was the top grade in the schools in Rotuma and I was too young to leave school—only 10 years old—so I had to stay in school.

During my second year in the 5th grade—it was 1941—one of the teachers left to join the service in Fiji, so the other teacher asked me to take a class. For three months I taught Class 3. I was only 11 years old at the time. My pay was 12 shillings a month. In 1942 Wilson Inia came to Rotuma and took about six of the best students, including myself, to coach for the Queen Victoria School examination. I was the youngest of them. At the end of 1942 we sat for the examination, and myself and two others passed. But they said that I was too young to be accepted, so in 1943 I went to the Paptea school for about a month. Then I was having severe headaches every morning about 9 o’clock for about three weeks. I would cry out loud until school was over about 3 o’clock, without any inhibitions at all. The AMO [Assistant Medical Officer] recommended that I leave school, so I did. After I left school, the headaches stopped completely. Later on in that year another teacher came to the Malhaha school and I went back for the third term.

I had ear trouble at that time too, and maybe it was the wind in Paptea—that’s the windy part of the island—or maybe it was a fear of the schoolteacher, who was pretty rough. He used to walk all over the class, hitting the students over the head with a stick if they didn’t know their lessons. Sometimes he would hardly give you time to answer.

At the end of the year I sat for the entrance examination again and passed, but I didn’t come top and missed getting the Rotuman scholarship. The next year, in 1944, I went to Fiji, but I didn’t go to Queen Victoria School. I went to Lelean Memorial School at Davuilevu and they placed me in Class 5. This was my fifth year in Class 5, but it was a more
advanced school. I was 14 years old at the time. In the first year I was not very happy because I didn’t know English well enough, and I knew no Fijian. For the first few weeks I knew nothing about what the teacher said. Then gradually I got to know some Fijian and my English got better and I got to know some boys. This was the first time that I was absolutely separated from home. Many of the things you did at home you couldn’t do at the boarding school. We had to wash our own clothes and look after our own things. We had to learn to be completely independent. The first two years were spent getting on my feet and adjusting to the new life. I didn’t do badly those first two years. I came in second in my class both years. The third year I was well adjusted and did well. I came in top in the end-of-the-year examination. After the fourth year, I sat for the Fijian Qualifying Examinations after coming in tops in my class. I got through and was selected to go to medical school, but at the time I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I went back to secondary school at Davuilevu. Then I went into Form III. At the end of that year I came back to Rotuma for a holiday at Christmas.

When I came back I was shy at first, but soon I got my feet, and realised that I wasn’t so bad after all. I had been away and had learned something, and the girls looked up to me, and I was able to take advantage of them quite easily. My emotions were very intense. I really went for it. It was new and I certainly enjoyed it. To break it off was very painful.

That was my first taste of adult life. My friends had all finished school and some of them were already married. I was 18 years old at the time. I learned to smoke and drink at that time. My mom was still alive then and she still treated me like a pet.

At one of the beach games I met a girl who I really thought I liked. I told my mother that I didn’t want to go back to school the next year. She
said it was up to me. Just before the boat came, my elder brother, who was the money earner in the family—cutting copra—sent over my school fees and paid for my passage on the boat. It was he who supported me through school when my father was getting too old to work. He learned what had happened but he flatly refused to accept it. He said that this would be one time that he would have his way after all he had done—that I had to go back to school, so I went back. I went, but I didn’t intend to go to school. I planned to collect the money my brother had sent and go to Suva to work. My very close friend was with me and we decided to do this together. We were a month late to school. We went to the headmaster and asked for the money our respective brothers had sent, telling him our intentions, and also asked him for testimonials. I don’t mean to boast, but we were the two best brains in the school. He looked at us and flatly refused. He said he would send the money back to our brothers and wouldn’t give us a testimonial—for one thing it was past the time for us to apply for government jobs. So that ended our job hunting and we went back to school. That was a tough year for us, because we had had a taste of outside life. We were real smokers by then, and we weren’t permitted to smoke in school, so we had to smoke in secret. As a matter of fact we were caught once and were given four hours of hard labour.

After Form V, I took the Cambridge School Certificate Examination and passed. Ordinarily it’s given at the end of Form VI, but you can sit for it at the end of Form V if your teacher thinks you have a chance.

After that year I came back to Rotuma for another holiday—to renew my acquaintances. Only this time I was a bit older and realised that marriage was out of the question. I had no job. This time I enjoyed a bit of the mane’a [the play time during the Christmas holidays], but I was
somewhat disappointed. The first time I came, I thought this was the life. This time I felt differently. I still liked it, but not enough to want to stay. For one thing I was thinking about getting a government job.

I didn’t want to go back to school, partially because the last year I didn’t have a very good record—smoking and acting up, and I felt that my presence might be a bad influence on the younger boys. The last two years I had been a school prefect—an older boy who looks after the younger boys and directs them. Also, my father was getting too old to support me and my brother had gotten married and had started a family of his own, so I couldn’t expect him to support me much longer, so I decided it was about time I got a job and support myself.

I went back and saw the headmaster and he asked me what I wanted to do, and I told him I wanted to go to the teacher’s training school at Nasinu. The government supplies board, tuition and pocket money (10 shillings per month). All you have to supply is your clothes. I still don’t know why I decided to become a teacher. Maybe it was because of my experience of teaching when I was 11. It might have been in the back of my brain that I liked teaching.

I had more freedom in training college, so I liked it better. I dare say I was very happy during those two years. I did very well. I suspect I was either first or second the last year, but no positions were announced. I was a member of the student council the last year.

After getting my teacher’s certificate, I was appointed to Queen Victoria School as an assistant master. That was a good opportunity for me because I worked with people who were experts in their various fields. I learned quite a bit there from the masters themselves. I taught three years there and after that I went to a training college in New Zealand; it was a two-year course. I studied in a general training program and one
year of the university course directed by the University of Auckland. New Zealand was absolutely new. It was as big a jump from Suva as Suva was from Rotuma. The first year was quite different for me. The Europeans in Suva don’t mix freely with the coloured people. In New Zealand, the people don’t seem to realise you’re black or brown. There’s no colour bar. It might be there, but I didn’t suffer from it. The people were friendly.

One thing that impressed me was the general high standard of living compared with Rotuma and Suva. The methods of teaching also impressed me. There was more freedom for the students. For example, if you strike a student in New Zealand you can be prosecuted for assault. In Fiji and Rotuma, the teachers strike the students quite often, even though there are rules against it. Also the abundance of material things, like books and general school equipment, like sports equipment.

I had about five months of student teaching, not all at one stretch. I taught European children, and sometimes the children would tell me that their mother wanted me to come for tea, but they usually lived too far. European children are not shy. Even if you’re new to a class, if you ask them to tell stories there will be many hands up. In my opinion it was harder. First of all, they’re so active. You have to keep moving all the time. Rotuman children are not so very active. They’re very passive.

I left New Zealand in 1957 and went to Suva, where I was appointed to Rotuma. I arrived in Rotuma towards the end of February 1958. That was when they first started the secondary department at the Malhaha school. I was appointed to teach Form III.

My mother died when I was in New Zealand. It wasn’t much of a shock because she was old. I had a few beers with the boys on the following day and cried a bit, but if I wasn’t drunk, I don’t think I would have.
There was nothing to do in Rotuma like there was in New Zealand—no horse racing, no Saturday sports … the only thing there was beer. Drinking beer was the only sort of entertainment I was able to find.

I met my wife in Fiji for the first time in 1952. She was staying with my cousin—being my cousin’s wife’s relative. But at that time she was a little kid. When I came back from New Zealand I met her again and she was grown up. I arranged through a relative of mine to have her come along to one of the cafes for lunch with us, in Suva, and I proposed to her that day—in cold blood. She wasn’t very keen on the idea. She expected me to treat her as my cousin would—being an affinal relative—with respect. She said she would tell my cousin, as though she were trying to frighten me, but I told her that I couldn’t care less, that there was no harm done. Nothing more was said. Actually I had asked her to come with me on the boat to Rotuma … I would pay her way and we would ask her parents for permission to marry.

I came to Rotuma and she continued to work in Suva. In December of that same year she came to Rotuma. I didn’t bring up the subject of marriage that year. That was because there was a hurricane and my house got blown down. I was too tied up financially to get married. She stayed for the Christmas holiday and I saw her now and then. I knew that she didn’t dislike me, although I don’t think she had any particularly strong feelings towards me either. She went back to Fiji in January. In April she came back to Rotuma and there was a rumour about that she was going to stay for good. Sometime in May or June I wrote her a letter, forcing the issue, but no reply came. Actually that wasn’t a bad sign. In Rotuma a girl sometimes won’t answer because if something happens the boy might use such a letter to ridicule her. If she really rejected me she could write a letter and tell me off, so I wasn’t discouraged. During the
next few social occasions I wanted to see where I stood, and I found that there was no change in her attitude. I asked her about the letter and she said she had read it. During the two-week holiday I spent the first week drinking, and the second week I went to her district to see what I could do. I saw her during that week but there was no mention of marriage. I decided on the last Sunday of that week to see her grandfather, the chief of that district. She had been on my mind for two years. I went to him on the following Tuesday, and he responded favourably. We had a full-scale Rotuman wedding in February. During the engagement period I didn’t see her at all.

On my wedding day I wasn’t really myself. I was almost oblivious to what was going on. It wasn’t until about a week later that I really realised what had happened. So far I like married life very much. Sometimes I think about going out with the boys, but my wife’s family has been good to me, and that kind of compensates for my loss. Now I talk in the plural—I speak of we, and ours, instead of I and mine.

I was first elected to the Council of Chiefs last year. That was when the first representatives were elected. I thought I might do good in the Council so I had a friend nominate me, so he wrote a letter of nomination and found a man to second it, and they sent the letter to the District Officer. Mine was the only genuine nomination. There were a couple of others, but the people had signed the others’ names—Rotuman style—and as a consequence I was automatically elected.

When I first attended a Council meeting I was rather awed by it and thought it might prove to be beyond me. Later on I found I was able to hold my own. I was one of the few educated people on the Council, and I found the outlook of the majority quite narrow. One thing I found in the Council is you have to take things very easy. Radical changes, even though
they may be good ones, won’t be followed by the people. Take the Land Commission, for example.

The idea was to register and survey the lands. That’s where the old ideas and the modern ideas clashed. The modern idea was to register people in only one or two kainaga, but the old idea was having your rights intact in all your kainaga. The people couldn’t see that registration in one or two kainaga did not necessarily interfere with your rights in the other kainaga. If the people had a bit more education they would have been able to read the bill without it being interpreted. Even many of the Council members couldn’t read the bill and it had to be translated into Rotuman. If the Council members couldn’t understand the bill, how could the poor people in the villages understand it?
Chapter 8
Women Born in the 1920s

(Age 38)
I was the youngest in a family of six children, and we all lived together with our parents. They were very good and kind to us but we were poor, and sometimes we could read on their faces that they were worried about something. We always could tell from the expressions on their faces whether they were happy or sad. I was the youngest and really was my parents’ pet. They always did whatever I asked them to do for me. My father worked very hard and tried every means he could to earn money for us. They used to tell us sometimes that if we wanted something and my father could not provide it right away, we should try not to cry out and should be patient, because my father was poor and if he could, he would get it for us afterwards. It came about that all the others had gone to school except me, and then I realized that my parents loved me much more than the rest. They took me with them every place they went and whatever I asked for they always got for me.

In school I became very lazy and I played instead of trying to learn. I did funny things and made all sorts of sounds which attracted the others’ attention, and many times I got the stick from my teacher. I acted like this for three years and never got promoted. When I entered boarding school I was still the same. Lessons became harder and I played more than one could expect from a big girl like me. I made a fool of myself and said all kinds of funny things that distracted everyone in the classroom, so sometimes I was sent outside for punishment. I nearly jumped for joy when one day our school mistress told me that from then on I would stay
and help the others without having to do schoolwork. I preferred to play
than to sit down and work seriously. After six years in the boarding school
I went home and helped my mother with the domestic work.

It is hard to say that I really helped my mother properly because I
couldn’t stay still for a whole day doing the same thing. The neighbouring
adolescent girls liked me because I used to do funny things to make them
laugh. They came over and we spent the evenings together in my home,
but sometimes we would go out for a stroll.

One day I met a boy whom I seemed to love. We began to see
each other and spoke about the future. This boy knew how to play music
and this made me like him even more. I thought he was the only man in
the world. I told my parents about him and that we wished to get married
as soon as we possibly could, but my parents told me that I was still too
young. My brothers and sisters had all gotten married and only myself was
left and they wanted me to stay with them. That boy and I kept on seeing
each other so one day I went with him to his home. My parents were very
angry with me but I didn’t care. This boy promised to take good care of
me so I was willing to leave my parents. Our wishes and dreams came true
and we finally got married. I found out later on that this boy’s family was
as poor as my parents were, and we had to work hard to look after
ourselves and this boy’s parents. After we had had six children we were
still living with his parents, but they were not easy people to live with.
Finally, one day my husband built a native-style house and we and our
children went to live there, leaving his parents with his sister and husband
to look after them. My husband did his best and worked hard after that,
because we had a family of our own, and he had to support us by himself.

It happened sometimes that I was called on to act as the hän maneʻak
sū [clown] at weddings and was supposed to do all kinds of funny things,
but my husband was very kind and is of good character and he didn’t mind it. People laughed and enjoyed my funny actions and movements, but I couldn’t tell whether they really enjoyed the merriments of my funny actions, or whether they were really laughing at how ugly I made myself look, but still I didn’t care, even though sometimes I overheard people saying that I was just like an ape. My husband and children were still the same despite all these things.

Sometimes after I was married I would go and spend a few days with my parents, and I felt very sorry when my father died because I knew he really loved me despite my wrongdoings to him and my mother. Anything I did was always all right with him.

Now my husband and I have about ten children and we are doing our best to afford them with their needs. I can remember that my parents had had a hard time doing the same thing for us when we were young. Now only my mother is alive and she is still living with my eldest brother, but I wish she was with me so that I could treat her the way she treated me when I was a child.
(Age 37)

I was the eldest of four daughters in our family. We had no brothers. I had a different father than my other sisters and I was raised by my mother. She had no husband to help her and she had to take care of me by herself. It was a pity to see her working so hard in order to be able to get what we needed from the family we lived with. I always envied the neighbouring children with all their fancy toys and nice new clothes, but whenever I would ask my mother for something, she would look at me sadly and tell me not to ask for anything because she wouldn’t be able to get it for me. As I became a little older I learned what my mother could get me and what she couldn’t, so I only asked for what I knew she could get and she would get it for me.

I can remember the day when my mother got married and she told me that I was going to have a father and that he would be able to get for me the things I wanted. My stepfather was a kind man. He loved my mother and me and whatever I asked him for he always gave it to me. He worked very hard and my mother was able to stay with me in the house instead of having to go out and do the work of a man. I was a pet to my stepfather and I became more cheeky than anyone would have suspected before my mother had gotten married.

My mother had a baby girl but my stepfather still treated me the same way. After they had had only two children my stepfather died. I cried and cried thinking about him and how kind he had been to me. I felt as bad as if he would have been my real father; everybody in the village always spoke about his kindness towards my mother and me. I really missed him very much, and my poor mother once again had to work very hard to provide for the three of us.
She sent me to school, but I was a poor student and spent several years in school without getting promoted to a higher class. I felt bad to see my mother working so hard so I stopped going to school in order to stay home and help her.

I made friends with some of the neighbouring girls and we always played games like cards and things like that. I happened to meet a boy to whom I was attracted, and he in turn was attracted to me. Finally one day we met and talked and before long we were married and I went to live in my husband’s home. My mother got married again too and went with her two daughters to her husband’s home.

I felt very strange at the beginning of our marriage and I felt very embarrassed with my husband, but he acted as though he were a real man and a husband to me. We stayed together and I began to know what kind of character he really had, and I felt that I didn’t want this kind of man for a husband. We stayed together many years without children so I finally left him and went back to my mother. I stayed with my mother and her husband, and after about two years I got married to another man whom I thought to be kinder than my first husband. I went to live in his home. At first he was nice and kind to me, but later on he didn’t allow me to go to any other house in the village. He didn’t like to see me laughing with anyone, and whenever he was angry at someone else he would come home and take it out on me. I had our first child—a baby girl—but still my husband acted the same to me. I was frightened at that time that he might kill me if I would try to run away from him, and because of his jealousy I just sat at home like a mouse caught in a trap. I couldn’t say a single word whenever he was angry. Instead of being happy I was sadder than a slave. We have stayed together for many years now and have had about ten children, but my husband has not really changed much. Many times I
thought of leaving him, but I didn’t know who would take care of my children if I did. I wish he could change his manners and be like my stepfather who brought me up.

My mother’s second husband died and she came to live with me and brought her daughter with her. But we were all the same to my husband—we had to do everything according to his wishes. Never mind if I was ready to give birth to a child, he would make me go with him to work in his plantations or cut copra. What a life! I never saw another woman who has worked as hard as I have done. I have stuck it out because I wanted to avoid quarrelling, because we already had many children and I felt sorry for them. But I know he won’t change his character.

A few years ago one of our daughters of about 5 years old died. I was really sad about it because it was the first time I had ever met with such a thing—my own child to be dead. My husband seemed to feel sad, too, but still he was the same old man—he’ll never change.

Now we are living together with my mother and our children, and I have given up thinking about changing my way of life, because I’m afraid he would give us up. Besides, he supports us with the food we need and whatever the children ask for he always brings home for them.
(Age 36)

Out of the twelve of us children, only three survived. I was the eldest and was brought up by my auntie and her husband. I think they didn’t want me to think of my parents, and they did their very best for me. They had no children and whatever I would ask for, they would give me. I had everything I needed, even toys. I went to school and came back home to play with my toys or I would roam around the village, but they still treated me as a little child. When I reached the age of 10, I entered boarding school. My auntie still washed my clothes and brought my food, but unluckily she was forced to leave me and go to Makogai [leper colony]. I was left alone with my uncle and yet he didn’t want me to go back to my parents. I didn’t know how to wash my clothes and he washed them for me. I became a cheeky child and most of the people hated me for my pride. They said that my uncle and aunt petted me too much; that was why I became this sort of a child. I didn’t pay any attention to my teachers and came last in every test. I hated school and instead of listening I played and became worst in our class. I was very naughty thinking this was a nice thing to be proud of. My auntie returned after two years and I couldn’t express how glad I was to see her back again.

After six years in boarding school, I was still in Class 4. I left for home. I made friends with my neighbours and we stayed together sometimes when we wished to go for picnics on Sundays and during holidays. We were together for a few months when one day my auntie told me that one boy had come to tell her that he wanted me to marry him. I was a bit annoyed, but she comforted me and said that she knew that that boy was nice and that he might love me. I agreed at last but I didn’t really know him.
We got married two months later and it made me feel funny and strange in the beginning. I was, so to say, ashamed of my husband and most of the time I spent with my parents in their home. I was just getting used to being in this state of a married life when I went to stay with my husband. He was a nice man and loved my aunt and uncle as I did. We stayed together for a while with them before coming to his home, where we are staying now. We had more than ten children and I realize now that naughty children are really bad; I thought back to the time when I was a very naughty child, but that was because I was a bit spoiled by my aunt and uncle. My husband was so kind to me that we stayed together for many years without quarrelling. He did his best to give me everything I would ask for and what our children need. I do hope that they won’t follow in my footsteps from when I was a child. I know what kind of person I became after being spoiled. I hardly knew how to keep my home in order; it was hard for me to settle down with everything at home.

My auntie died a few years after my uncle’s death. I really felt very sad about them because they did love me, and I knew that they did more for me than if I had lived with my own parents.

Now I am living with my husband and children in his home where he supports us with what I need for the children while my own parents are living in another village.
My mother died when I was 3 years old, but I didn’t feel anything because I was too small at the time. After my mother died I lived with my grandmother [mother’s mother], my aunt [mother’s sister], and my brother. My brother was younger than I. As far as I can remember, our lives were poor.

My brother died when I was 13 years old and I felt very sad for a long time—for about a year. I knew that only he would do everything I wanted, so when he died I knew I’d never get the things I want easily.

When I was 14 years old, my grandmother took me to Fiji and I lived with my mother’s sister and her husband. In the beginning I liked Fiji, because everything was new to me, but when I got used to it I didn’t like it any more. Anytime we wanted something we had to get money for it. Also, I lived with my aunt, but I wasn’t really happy because she wasn’t my real mother, and I couldn’t act with her the way I could have with my own mother. I had to show respect to her and not do anything without her permission. I found out that living in Fiji is very different than living in Rotuma, and I liked Rotuma better. In Fiji I needed money for anything that I wanted, but in Rotuma if you didn’t have the money to get something you could go fara [begging] and the owner will give it to you without money.

When I was 18 years old, I went back to Rotuma to my aunt there, and I got married the following year. After I was married I realized how very different married life was from single life. For me, married life was much better than my life before I was married. My husband did everything that I wanted better than anyone when I was living with my grandmother. I love my husband and he makes me very happy all the
time. Now we have eight children and they, too, make me happy. I love my children even more than I love my husband.
(Age 32)

There were seven children in our family, and I was the second eldest. I can remember that first I was living with my brothers and sisters, but since there were too many of us, my uncle and his wife came and took me with them. My uncle was my mother’s brother. He had no children and they took good care of me. They took me anyplace they might go to spend the evening. They were not very poor and I would get anything I might ask for. I always had new dresses whenever we went anywhere for a few days on a holiday. I became very cheeky, and when I visited my parents my mother told me that I would grow up to be a spoiled child and would be the worst of the children in the neighbourhood. I thought it was a good thing to be a daring child, so I kept on with my misbehaviours. My auntie just told me to be kind and that I should never tell lies when I would be a grown-up person.

When I was about 7 years old, my uncle sent me to school. I liked to learn, but sometimes the lessons were a bit hard and my exercises were not right and I got the stick on my fingernails, so I stayed away from school sometimes. But I tried and tried, and it happened that I came first in the class and was promoted each time to a higher class. When I reached the age of 14, my auntie became very ill and I was forced to leave school so that I could stay home to look after her. After a few months in bed she died, leaving my uncle and myself. You could not imagine how sorry I was, for I knew that now I would have to look after my uncle and myself. There was nobody to be trusted except myself. Now there wasn’t anybody to do whatever I wished for or to help me with the domestic work. I had to do all the daily work myself before the thoughts of my auntie had hardly faded away. At that time I hardly knew how to cook or get a meal ready
for my uncle and myself. But after a few years I was able to manage our home and my uncle trusted me as much as if my aunt were still alive.

I began to make friends with my neighbours and began to go out with other girls taking evening strolls, but my uncle didn’t like me to go out in the evening, and because I was frightened of him I stayed in. I told my friends the reason why I stayed away and they left me alone.

Not long after that I began to notice the way my uncle was beginning to treat me. He still loved me, but in a different way. I became very scared of him, but he acted as if he were doing nothing wrong—but it was very bad for me because his love had changed over and we were no longer uncle and niece, but husband and wife. I was very frightened because he told me that if I would tell anyone he would kill me. I was even too frightened to tell my parents. I just stayed there until I had a baby from my cruel uncle. I was a bit silly that time, I suppose, because I should have gone and told my parents at the beginning, but I stayed on as if my uncle were doing the right thing.

My parents came and told me to go, but I was still scared because he said he would kill me, and I told them that it didn’t make any difference that he was my uncle—I would stay and marry him, because by then I had already had a baby from him. Everybody seemed to mock us, and whenever we went somewhere they seemed to look at us like foreigners. He was an old man, but he frightened me with his knife, and we did get married.

After a few years we went over to stay in Fiji. There we had another child, but imagine the difference between us—he was 60 years old, while I was only 29. Everybody thought that we were uncle and niece, and they were really surprised when they heard that we were husband and wife. By then I grew more and more to love him, because he was old and
feeble, and only I would take care of him because all our relations were
angry at us. After five years we came back to Rotuma with our two
children and found that both of my parents had died. What a pity to think
of what I had done. They had been angry at me and I went away without
saying I was sorry to them, and when I came back they were dead. All this
happened because I was so afraid of my uncle … husband.

After a year he died, leaving me and our children. I did feel sad
because I was used to living with him, but on the other hand I was glad,
for I knew that now I could go anyplace I wanted without someone
stopping me. I was just like a jailbird when I was living with my uncle and
now when I think of it I just feel angry about it. Now everyone can see that
I am very happy living amongst my neighbours with my children—a
family of our own, with my eldest son working and supplying all our needs.
As far back as I can remember I was well treated by my parents. They worked very hard and tried their very best for me not to cry out in want of any food or anything else. I remember that sometimes I wanted to go with them and wanted one of them to carry me, so they did. My father knew what kind of native foods are good for children so he did his best and not once was I in need of food. During the last war so many people were short of clothing, but I was not because my mother took care of my clothes and gave me only the clothes I needed on each occasion.

I have three sisters and two half-brothers and two half-sisters. We were brought up to love each other and yes, we did. My two half-brothers were not living with us but still I love them and any time one of them comes home I treat him nicely.

I found life during school days was hard when I was small. I was proud of myself during school days because every year I received rewards from my teachers for being first in class. I loved schooling, and was promoted every year to higher classes until I entered secondary school in Fiji where I was alone to take care of my belongings. I began to worry about my parents and how different my new leaders treated me. So instead of doing my best in my studies, I began to be downhearted. I only stayed in secondary school for three years when I sent for my father to come and take me away, and he did as I wanted.

I was left with my younger sister and her husband in Suva and she let me go to dances and movies. I started to look at the adolescent boys who were the same age as myself. When I began to make boyfriends I was frightened my parents might find out and they might object, but they were mainly concerned that I might choose a bad boy. They just gave me their advice. They wanted me to choose the right man so that we could make a
good family. I had some boyfriends whom I went with and we loved each other, but soon I found that our manners were different. I left them but I had a hard feeling trying my best to stay away from them.

At last I found the right one. We arranged our marriage and now we are staying together with my parents at my home. Just after we got married I thought that we would be staying in the same mood throughout life. We were in great happiness. Both of us stayed home, not roaming like before. When I was single I went to any place I wished to; all I had to do was let my mother know. But now I find that life is growing harder and whatever I want to do I have to let my husband know, and I have to do as he wishes.

Now we have four children and I realize that I am leading a harder life than I had ever dreamt of. I have to work hard now to keep my children clean and healthy. I try to treat them nicely, the way my parents treated me. Sometimes I feel sorry for them because I know that I will not get everything they need like my parents did for me when I was small. Now I just pray that my children will grow up to love each others and to lead a good life.

Once I got seriously ill and was taken to the hospital and I was worried about my children. They don’t know yet how to do their clothes and clean themselves. If I die my children will be left behind and I don’t know whether they’ll be living a happy life or not. It happens to many children that their mothers died and their fathers got married again and their stepmothers don’t treat them as nicely, so these children are living a sad and unhappy life. I am glad that I am up again and have a chance to look after my children again.
(Age 30)
As far back as I can remember I was living with my parents and brothers and sisters. The first thing I can remember is when I was about 6 years old. That’s when I started school. In school I learned to do the right thing. I liked school very much because I met many children that I didn’t know before, and we had a lot of fun playing together. Sometimes in school I was punished by the teacher, but I didn’t care. The teacher usually punished me for playing in the classroom.

I came out from school when I was 14 years old and stayed at home with my family. For the first week after I stopped going to school I felt very bad because I thought of the fun I used to have playing with my friends, and it made me feel like going back again. But after a few weeks at home I got used to it and didn’t think about going to school again. I stayed home and helped my mother, and she taught me how to fish and how to make mats.

Both my mother and father were very kind to us, but I loved my mother more than my father. That was because I always worked together with my mother, but I didn’t spend so much time with my father, so I didn’t think about him as much as I thought about my mother. I loved both of them, but I loved my mother more.

Mother taught me how to work, and by the time I was about 18 years old I knew very well how to work in the Rotuman way. I also knew how to fish very well. I got married in 1950, and I found out that for me married life was better than being single. My husband was very kind to me. He is even more kind to me than my mother or father. Sometimes they couldn’t get me what I wanted, but my husband always gets me whatever I want.
When my husband became chief I felt very bad—right up until now. I’m afraid, because I know I have to be kind to the people all the time and have to lead the women in the right way. I always worry about what I should do to lead the people in the right way and make them happy. This is the first time in my life that I’ve always had to worry about what I’m going to do and whether my husband and I will be able to do the right things. I feel anxious because we are poor people and it will be very hard for my husband and me to get the things that the people will need to make them happy. If the people like you they will do what you say, but if they are angry at you they won’t want to do what you want them to. This is the first time in my life that I am really worried and live unhappily, because my husband has become a chief and we are poor people. It’s better for a rich man to be chief.
I was born in 1930 in my mother’s home and was the only child in our family. After three months, my parents moved to my father’s home, and that is the only home I’ve ever really known. I’ve lived there from then until today.

When I was a small girl I had many friends. They always came home to play with me, but I never went out to play with them in their homes. When I was about 4 years old, sometimes I can remember going out with my father to his plantations in the bush. I saw that he was planting food, and I realized that this was the place from which he brought food home each day. Some other times I went with him to the store when he was going to buy something, and I saw him buy things to eat, and sometimes other things, like dresses for me. Sometimes, too, I went with my mother and she would buy nice things for me, like jewels and toys, to make me happy. Seeing all these things, I began to know that there were some things that my father produced himself, and other things that must be bought at the store. I also remember many times when my mother would come home from fishing in the sea, bringing plenty of fish with her, and then cooking them for me to eat. I also saw her quite often making mats inside the house. Sometimes I would go with my father or mother to feed the pigs.

One time I can remember that my father was sick and had to be in bed for two months. During that time I always went with my mother to the bush and moved the cows and my father’s horse for grazing. I would pick up ripe fruits, like mangoes or vi [Spondias dulcis], which had fallen under the trees near the road, and eat them. That’s why I liked to go with my mother every day when she went to move the animals. I was very happy that time, because I liked to eat mangoes and vi, and also oranges.
When I was young my parents treated me very well. They always tried to give me everything I wanted. I remember one time at Christmas when I went with my father to buy a Christmas present for me. I saw a nice toy in the store. It was a pretty doll with a pretty dress, and I wanted my father to buy it, but at that time the price of copra was very bad, and it was a very hard time for everyone who had to earn money from cutting copra, like my father. It wasn’t bad for the people who were earning their money from jobs—it was easy for them—but for the people who had to cut copra it was a hard time. My father wanted to buy me an umbrella, but I liked the doll better. The two were the same price, and finally my father bought both of them because he did not want to make me worry about the toy, and the umbrella was a useful thing. He knew I liked the toy better, and that’s why he bought both of them for me. I’ll never forget that day.

When I was 5 years old, the welfare nurse told my mother that it would be better to send me to school, because I grew quickly and was the biggest girl in the baby show. So my parents sent me to school at Upu. The first day I went to school I was frightened of the teacher, and the children, too. But the next day I started to make friends and play with the other children. They were older than me and had been in school before. Soon I liked school better than anything, but my mother never let me go to school when it was raining or when the sun was very hot. When that would happen I would cry.

When I was 6 years old, my mother got sick and the doctor took her to the hospital. She stayed in the hospital for a month, and when she came out my father sent her to Fiji for a holiday and I went with her. I stayed in Fiji with my mother for three months, and then we returned to Rotuma and I went to school again. At that time English wasn’t being
taught at Upu. Most of the children at the school from my district were Methodist; I was the only Catholic child amongst them. On every Monday and Friday when school was over the Methodist children would be dismissed, but the Catholic children would stay in school and study catechism for about half an hour. The children from my district would always stay and play outside, waiting for me to finish catechism so we could go home together.

In 1938, when I was 8 years old, I stopped going to school for a whole year because I was sick. I got yaws, and it was a very bad disease. At the end of 1939 I went to school again, and this time the teacher began to teach me how to sew and embroider and crochet.

When I was 11 years old, I started going to boarding school at Upu. I was very happy in boarding school. Every morning we woke up and went to mass. After mass, we had breakfast and then went to school. I lived in boarding school for six years and was very happy every day. I tried hard to learn everything that the sisters taught me to do, including studying in school. In 1944 the sister began to teach me some English, but I found it very hard to learn. At the Upu school, Class 5 was the highest. I stayed in class from 1940 until 1946, when the headteacher started Class 6. I stayed in Class 6 for two years and came out from school in 1947. My teacher wanted to send me to Fiji for further schooling, but my parents didn’t want me to go far away from them and wanted me to come home instead.

During that first year at home I was not very happy because I was used to living with many girls like myself, but I was also happy to live with my parents again and help them with their work. But I still kept thinking about the time I was in school. For me, the best thing I can think of is to study in school and learn every subject.
In 1948, I went to Fiji and stayed for three months, and this helped me to forget all about school, and I began to feel happy again. After I returned, a young man came and talked to my father and asked to marry me. My father consented and told me that he would like me to marry this young man, and we were married on April 28th, 1949. I had seen this boy before, but I had never talked with him. On the day before the wedding we went together to talk to Father Soubeyran, and he told us all about being husband and wife. I was nervous and surprised, because I had never been in love with anyone before. So the next day we got married in church, and after that we had a Rotuman-style ceremony at my father’s house. On my wedding day I felt very embarrassed and strange.

After a week had passed, and everybody had gone home leaving only our family, I realized how different married life was from when I was single. I found married life harder than unmarried life. I loved my husband very much and always did everything good for him. But after about five months something happened. One night about 3 o’clock in the morning my husband surprised me. He woke me up and asked me what I was going to do—go with him to his home or stay here? I was so startled that I couldn’t answer his question, so he asked me again. He said that he had taken all of his things back to his house, except his knife, which he was holding in his hand. I was frightened and told him that I would stay at home, so on that night we separated. From that night on I stopped loving him. Then, after five years, he came back to my parents one time and apologized to them for his mistakes and for the bad things he did to me and asked them to forgive him. He said he wanted to return to me at our home. I told him that if he promised not to do what he did before he could stay, but after one month, he got angry with me on one Sunday morning.
and went back to his house. Since then we have never been together, and I have never made anyone else my boyfriend.

After a year, I met a boy and he tried to make love to me. He was two years older than me but had never been married before. I loved him, but we were both Catholic, and I knew it would be very bad for me to make him my lover, because we both knew that a person cannot marry twice in Church if they have a husband or wife who’s still living. He went away to Fiji soon after that, but after about three years he came back to talk to me. I had told him to try and find another girl to marry, but he said that it was very hard for him to marry someone else knowing that I still didn’t have a husband. I told him to stop thinking of that, because we were both Catholic and knew the laws of the Church. Soon after that he went to Fiji.

Not long after that my father got sick and had to go to Suva for medical care, and I had to look after my mother and me, because I had no brothers. I got a job as secretary for the co-op, after studying bookkeeping at night under Wilson Inia. Now I have a good job and am able to help my father support our family. My ambition is to always give my best, and to look after my mother and father. I want to make everything go well, to love God and ask him to be with us everywhere and keep us happy.
Chapter 9
Men Born in the 1930s

(Age 29)
I was born on Uea and lived there with my mother and father. The first time in my life that I can remember is when I was about 4 years old. There were six families on Uea during that time. I was very happy then—I had no brothers and sisters with us, so my mother and father were very kind to me. They always gave me whatever I wanted. Actually I had four sisters, but they weren’t living on Uea with us. Besides, I was the only boy, so my father loved me very much. He took me everywhere he went. Sometimes he took me with him to Rotuma for a visit and my sister would want to go back with him to Uea, but he said no. Only I would go back with him.

When I was 6 years old, he brought me to Rotuma and left me there because I was old enough to go to school. After only a week both my mother and father came back from Uea to stay there with my sisters and me. I enjoyed living with my sisters because we would go to school together, and at home we used to play and joke all the time. My sisters loved me very much and they always took real good care of me because I was their only brother. From the time I was 6 until I was nearly 13 years old was the happiest time of my life. During that time I never had to do any hard work.

When I was 13 years old, I started to joke with the girls and began to make girlfriends. I started making love to girls around that time so I stopped liking school and wanted to stop going. I wanted to be able to act like the adolescent boys and go out with the girls every night without having to worry about going to school the next day. Sometimes the
teacher would give me some work to do but I didn’t feel like doing it because I was always thinking of the girls. There were only three things I felt like doing during this time—planting, fishing, and being with the girls. I knew that if you were good in planting and fishing the girls will like you very much and you’ll be able to get plenty of girls to make love to.

When I was 14 years old, I had an affair with a married woman. This affair began one day when we were out cutting copra. This woman had come faksoro [in this context, to beseech] to me to cut copra. I went with plenty other boys and girls. I met this woman and spent the whole day cutting copra with her. It was during the Christmas holiday season, so after we were finished cutting copra we had a maneʻa [play time] and we started to make love. Our affair lasted for about six months, and then her husband came back from Fiji. I would see her sometimes after her husband had returned and I joked to her about the way we had acted when her husband was in Fiji.

When I was 15 years old, my father took me to Uea and I lived there for two years before coming back to Rotuma. Soon after I came back, I met two other girls. On the first night I returned there was a dance. Before the dance I met one of the girls and she asked me if I would take her to the dance. I took her and after the dance I walked her home, but on our way back home we stopped someplace near the road and spent the whole night talking without sleeping. There was a dance the next night, too, but this girl’s parents didn’t want her to go because they knew we had been together the night before and they didn’t want her to meet me. But before the dance another girl asked me to take her. Her mother had invited me to dinner because I had just returned from Uea, and after dinner she asked me if I would take her. After the dance I took her home
and we slept together in her home. Then I had two girls that I was in love with and I couldn’t make up my mind.

The next day I went back to my mother and father in Uea. Before I had left that girl she asked me to come back again, so I went to Uea happily and returned at the end of a week. When I came back to Rotuma, the girl’s mother knew that we had made friends, so she didn’t like me anymore. Even after a month, she still didn’t like me. I met the girl again and she asked me to take her to Uea for a look around, just like she was coming tauapiri [to live with without being married]. So I took her to Uea, but no one knew that we had gone. After six months I came back faksoro [in this context, to apologise] to her parents. Her mother still didn’t like me, so I went back to Uea with my wife and my oldest sister. My mother and father then went over to Rotuma, so there were only the three of us on Uea. Then I went to Rotuma, too, and got caught in the hurricane of 1948 and couldn’t return to Uea, so I stayed in Rotuma to look after my mother and father. After the hurricane I went back to Uea.

In 1950, I came back to Rotuma with my wife and sister, but still my wife’s mother didn’t like me and got angry with me. She had wanted her daughter to marry someone else. I went faksoro again, and this time her mother accepted my apology. In 1951 or 1952 we got married and went to live at my home in Uea.

From the time I got out of school, I had a really good friend. We had promised that absolutely nothing would come between us, not even marriage. On alternate Sundays, my wife and I would go to eat with him at his house, or he would come to us. This went on until I knew that my friend liked my wife and was trying his luck, but I didn’t know if he had succeeded. I got angry with my wife, but not with my friend. At this time I
loved my friend more than my wife. We kept on seeing each other each week, and I say that my wife loved my friend more than she loved me.

Then my friend’s grandfather died. I took my wife to the funeral and left her there for the five-day mourning period to take care of my friend and to help his parents prepare food, etc. In my mind, I was testing them. After four days, however, everybody knew about these two. After the five days, my wife came back, but my friends came and told me about the way these two carried on. I asked my wife about this and she got angry with me. I left her, knowing that she would go back to her parents, who lived right next to my friend. I thought they would get married. My friend loved my wife’s oldest sister, however, and they got married instead.

After we were separated for about two months, I went faksoro to my wife to come back to me. Her parents wanted me to stay with them, so I stayed for one week and then my wife and I ran away. We really loved each other again and started to live happily as before. We got a daughter here. Then my wife quarrelled with my mother, and I took her to live with her mother’s side. This was in 1953.

At this time, we lived with our child and only my wife’s mother, because her husband had died. This lasted for only two years, before my wife started to try to make love to another man in her mother’s village. At this time I was working for Morris Hedstrom, making nine shillings a day. I would leave my wife and her mother at home in the morning, and come back at 4:30 in the afternoon. My parents told me that my wife had a boyfriend, but I didn’t believe it. I began watching my wife’s ways very closely, and saw that she was acting a little bit differently to me, so I figured that my parents were right.

One day I went back home at lunchtime. My wife’s mother had gone to visit her other daughter, and only my wife was home with the
child. But when I got home, I found only my daughter, who told me that my wife had gone to the bush. I went to the bush and caught my wife and her boyfriend right in the act of making love. My parents were right.

Before I had caught them, I had prayed to God that if what my parents had told me was true, let him show it to me. When he did, I was happy for the knowledge and didn’t get angry with either of them. Then I became a local preacher because of what God had done for me.

We didn’t separate at this time because I didn’t want my child to be fatherless or motherless, but I knew in my mind that we were going to separate. My wife started acting better to me than ever before, and I felt that we should separate when everything was alright, so nobody would get angry.

In 1955, the three of us went to Fiji. I went to Vatakoula and worked in the mines. Then we heard that the boy with whom I had caught my wife was going to get married. My wife wanted to go back to Rotuma—I think to try to break up the marriage. I paid her passage, but when she got back to Rotuma her boyfriend was already married, so she found another boyfriend. My mother and father wrote me in Vatakoula about her new friend.

I came back to Rotuma and was met on the boat by my parents and friends. They told me all about my wife and when I went to our home, I knew in my mind that we were going to separate. She didn’t realise that I knew about her, so I gave her a week to faksono. She didn’t, however, and in that week I found a note that she had written to her new boyfriend. I told her that it would be better if we separated. But she felt that if we separated without a fight, she would get the full blame, but if we quarrelled first, the blame would be shared. I didn’t give her a chance to quarrel but went back to my parents’ house.
Then I got a letter from one of my uncles in Levuka, who wanted me to come and stay and work for him. He telegraphed the District Officer to ask permission for me to go, and my wife went to the District Officer to try to make him stop me from going. He asked her if we were still living together and she said no. He told her that unless she came *faksoro* to me and I went back to live with her, she had no grounds to stop me from going. She came and told me that the District Officer said that I couldn’t go, and the day that the boat was to leave I went to him and asked him why he refused to let me go. He told me that my wife lied to me. That day my wife came *faksoro* and tried to keep me here, but I went to Fiji anyway. This was in 1957.

My first month at Levuka, I met another girlfriend. I took her to the movies one night and then made love to her. At this time, I had forgotten my wife. This girl was a half-caste and had European ways. I still had Rotuman ways, and when she wanted to kiss me in public, I would feel very ashamed. I didn’t like the way she acted, so I left her. Then I met a girl from Rotuma and made friends with her.

I came back to Rotuma in 1959. My wife wanted to live with me again, but I always went to live with my girlfriend that Christmas. My wife came and cried to my mother and kept trying to meet me to talk to me, but in my mind I never wanted to talk to her again. One day I came home and found my mother and my wife together. I told my mother to tell my wife to go home. My wife went instead to my sister’s house. Every night she would come *faksoro*. Then I got very sick and stayed with my sister, and my wife got me everything from the store that she knew a sick person would like. When I got well I loved her again and we lived together after three years of separation.
(Age 28)

There were twelve children in our family, and I am the eldest. Five of my brothers are still alive and three of my sisters. Two boys and one girl died. I lived at home with my mother and father until I was 13 years old, except for holidays with grandparents and other relatives. My relationship with my mother was quite close, but my old man was quite stern. I didn’t know him very well; I think I more or less feared him.

I started to go to school when I was 6 years old. I went to the Paptea school. There were only two teachers in the school at that time. I liked it then. I think most of the boys and girls in Rotuma like school when they first go. You have a chance to play around with your friends. There were only a few teachers, so you had plenty of freedom. I came in first in Class 2, a class of about thirty something. The schools then were giving out better prizes than they are nowadays. I can remember that I got one shirt and a pair of pants for coming in first.

I liked school when I was little, but when I got to Class 3 or 4 they began to give corporal punishments, cracking you on the head for just about anything. At that point I dreaded going to school just about every morning. The teacher at that time was very hard, but he was also the best teacher in Rotuma. I stayed in the Paptea school for about seven years, going through Class 6. In 1945 three of us sat for the entrance exam for the Queen Victoria School (QVS) in Fiji. Two of us passed and went to Fiji at the end of 1945 and started QVS in the beginning of 1946.

Going to QVS was totally different than anything I had known. I was one of the smallest boys in the school. You can imagine how I felt looking at the older fellows. My first year was horrible; as I was an outsider, the older boys always used to bully me. I made some very good friends, though. Some of the big boys used to give me a hand with things.
Besides school, we had to cut firewood and do an hours work every morning, before school, from 6 to 7 am. It was a boarding school. The food wasn’t very good; we had meat only about once a week. We had to wash our clothes and iron them. This was the first time I ever had to do this kind of thing and I found it tough. The big boys used to help sometimes, though, and the washing wasn’t too bad, although you can imagine how clean the clothes got. But the ironing was difficult, and sometimes you would spend fifteen minutes with a shirt and get nowhere.

During the first week at the school I got the measles and was sent to the hospital. I felt awful and missed my parents very much and the care they used to give me. I’d say I really missed home for about the first three months, but once you got to know the boys you tend to forget them. In the first exam I came last, mostly because I came back from the hospital only about three weeks before the exam.

The first year was preparatory and once we passed that we went into Form I. After failing that first exam I felt like chucking Suva altogether and going back home, but some of the boys encouraged me to carry on. It was worse because they arranged us in class according to the way we did on the exam—the person who did best in the back and the one who did worst right up in front. On the next exam I did better, though, and in the final exam at the end of the year I came in tenth out of about 35 pupils.

I spent seven years in the QVS, through Form VI. During the later years in the school I liked it very much and did quite well. I got through the Junior and Senior Cambridge exams all right, and during the fifth year I became one of the three house captains and head boys of the school.

I came back to Rotuma in 1951, after my sixth year. I sat for the Senior Cambridge exam in November and right after that came to
Rotuma. I was 19 years old at the time. I found Rotuma had changed. The people I knew had suddenly grown up and there were a lot of new houses, but the standard of living and things like that were the same. I had a lot of fun during that Christmas vacation and participated in the beach games. I met one girl that I liked very much and carried on a correspondence with her for a while, but I didn’t have any serious intentions. It was just my first contact with the opposite sex. My father said I was too young to get involved with a girl, probably because he was afraid I would lose interest in school. He told me not to get married until I was older and more settled. He nearly made me promise that I wouldn’t get married until I was over 30.

That was the year they had the big hurricane in Suva, so I didn’t get a boat back to Fiji until April. The vacation in Rotuma cost me plenty. I didn’t get back to school until the first term was almost over and I was quite a bit behind. The principal told me to stay for the two-week vacation, but that didn’t help much. I’d say that that holiday in Rotuma caused me to fail my last exam—the University Entrance. At the end of the year I was a bit too old to go back to school, so I went to work at the Government buildings. I got a job as a clerk in the Registrar General’s office. I stayed with this job for one year, and during that year the inspector of schools asked me if I would like to try teaching. My job as a clerk was easy-going, but there wasn’t much advantage to it. I wanted to do something that would be useful for the people in Rotuma. The inspector of schools asked me if I would like take a bursary (scholarship) to New Zealand to study education and come back to become a teacher. I looked upon that as one of the best chances I would ever get. I liked the idea of becoming a teacher. In fact I had applied for Nasinu Training College before, but I had backed out of it because my sister was already
going there. Being older than her, I felt that maybe I wouldn’t get on well with her; I felt that I might lose my feeling of priority over her if we came back on an equal basis.

I went to New Zealand early in 1954. At first I found it a bit strange. The first thing I noticed was the amount of cars. After being there for a week I started Ardmore Teacher’s College, about eighteen miles from Auckland. I found it easy to adjust to the life there. I didn’t feel strange at all, being with Europeans. There were many Maoris, Cook Islanders, and Samoans there. Besides, I had many European friends in Suva and had lived on and off with a New Zealand couple—he was a teacher. I spent three holidays with them. The only thing that really seemed strange to me was the size of the place. I didn’t find the schoolwork itself very hard. Most of it was just educational courses. I had some difficulty with physical education theory because some of the terms were new, and I hadn’t any experience with some of the activities that were included.

I wasn’t used to the social activities at the start. I wasn’t used to the idea of courting. At first I was rather embarrassed to ask a girl to go to the pictures, but I was lucky because on the boat to New Zealand I met two part-Maori women who had a niece in the college, and they wrote me a letter of introduction to her. I got to know her and she introduced me to a lot of other girls. There were about 800 girls and about 200 boys, so the girls would try to get the boys to date them. So about four or five months after I started, I began to date. I dated throughout the two years, but I never had any intention of having any serious affairs. For one thing it was against regulations for me to get married in New Zealand, and secondly I didn’t want to get a wife I couldn’t support. Someone who was used to
living in New Zealand would be apt to demand more than I could give her in life here in Rotuma.

I stayed in New Zealand until the middle of 1956. I got out of college at the end of 1955 but spent the last six months roaming around New Zealand, taking different jobs. My first job was on a sheep farm. I worked for a building contractor, on a wharf, in the freezing works, and as a delivery boy. I enjoyed that period very much. I saw a lot of people and a lot of places. I spent most of my other holidays visiting with people who had invited me to their homes. One time I hitch-hiked around 390 miles with my friend.

By the way, I was not supposed to work in New Zealand. It was the first thing they told me when I got off the boat. But they were lenient with me because I had been using my real name instead of a false one. Also, the people in Fiji didn’t know where I was, and the agency in New Zealand had been instructed to send me straight to Suva as soon as they got into contact with me. I went back to Auckland in April and saw the agency and they made my reservations back to Suva. The first plane I could catch was in July.

I came back to Suva and the education inspector had a good go at me for spending a six-month holiday without permission. They told me they paid my fare back only because I had a good record at the college; otherwise they wouldn’t have. They told me that I would start teaching at the same salary I earned as a clerk, and I told them I wouldn’t teach on that salary, so they ended up by offering me about one-and-a half times my old salary and I accepted. I started off at the Brother’s School in Suva. It’s a Catholic school attended by all denominations. I started off with a class of seventy-five. That’s a hell of a big class for the first time of teaching. I found it pretty hard, partly because it was my first time and
partly because there was such a mixture of people—Indians, Fijians, half-castes, Samoans, Rotumans—everything. I taught in both English and Fijian.

Then, at the end of 1956 I was assigned to be headmaster of the Motusa school, where I now am. At first the Rotuman children seemed very strange to me. The Rotuman children don’t act as European children do. Their interests are different. For one thing, their experiences are very narrow, and their sense of leadership is not as keen. I’ve tried two ways of inducing leadership. The first two years I tried to induce individual students to take responsibility for the class at times when I was gone. It didn’t work out very well. The individuals who were chosen didn’t know how to control the class, and the other children didn’t want to follow what the leader would say. Since the end of last year I’ve tried a new experiment—appointing class leaders for a term. It works quite well with some, but not so well with others. At first favouritism was a bit of a problem, but I threatened to punish the leaders if they showed favouritism. I tried to point out to them that when you are a leader you must regard everyone as an equal, regardless of who are your friends. Now I think it’s working quite well.

My impression of Rotuma on returning was quite good. I felt that Rotuma had advanced a good deal. For one thing, I feel the Rotumans have lost a lot of the old customs that should not exist, like the custom of fara [in this context, begging for favours]. Now the people don’t do this so much, and they’re getting used to the idea of selling. Some of the Rotumans regard that as a bad sign—the increase of selling—but in the long run I think it is best. I think the Rotumans are better able to look after themselves. Take the co-op, for example. When it first started there was a lot of suspicion. There was a lot of opposition from the Rotumans and
from the firms as well. Many of the people laughed at the idea, but now they’re joining it. In sports, for example, there was hardly anything played before without a fight, but now it’s gradually getting better, even though there are fights now and again.

In 1958 I was elected to the Rotuma Council of Chiefs as a district representative [mata]. My impression of Council meetings was that the District Officer had the say most of the time. The chiefs more or less followed whatever the D.O. suggested. That is probably because when there were European D.O.s the chiefs were in awe of them, and this attitude has continued towards the Rotuman D.O.s. At the beginning, the say of the representatives was very limited. Wilson Inia, for instance, was dismissed because of a difference with the D.O. I think the initial idea was for the Council representatives to be advisors, but that has gradually changed. Now I would say that the representatives have about equal rights as the chiefs. Now the representatives do most of the talking. We can usually persuade the chiefs to come around to our point of view. Some of the chiefs are quite conservative. One of the chiefs always looks at things from the religious point of view; one of the Council representatives is that way, too. On the whole, I think the Council functions pretty well. Sometimes the chiefs are a little slow to express themselves, but as a body I think it represents the opinion of the people pretty well.

Right now I have no future plans with regard to marriage. I’d like to continue to teach, or if some opportunity to help the Rotuman people arose, say in the RCA, I might take it.
(Age 26)

I was born and lived in Suva with my parents until 1939 when my father, who was a foreman of works building bridges, was transferred to the Western District on Viti Levu. I have four siblings, a brother and sister who are older than me and a brother and sister who are younger.

I started school at 6 years old in Lautoka at St. Thomas’ school, run by the Marist sisters. I didn’t like school at all until I got to Standard 6. I suppose it was because I would have preferred to go out fishing and swimming. I was somewhat mischievous and got the stick sometimes, but I don’t remember hating any teachers.

My relationship with my parents was just a normal one of respect and affection. I might resent it sometimes if they would punish me for something, but nothing very intense. I would fight with my brothers and sisters sometimes—just the usual sorts of thing. My father gave me most of the discipline. To a certain extent he was strict. He would tell me something once and would never repeat it. The second time he would give me a hiding or make me skip a meal. My mother was more or less the reverse. She was the one who gave me all the comfort; if I made a mistake, she wouldn’t belt me straight away. She more or less talked to me and tried to teach me.

During 1944 and 1945 I was seriously sick and dropped out of school on the doctor’s orders. I was always a sickly child—delicate. I didn’t really get better until I went to New Zealand. I couldn’t work very hard and although I liked sports, I couldn’t play very much. I think it was some sort of heart ailment. Also some sorts of food affected me. Some kinds of food I couldn’t keep in—I would spew them out. Life was sort of pleasant those two years. I was under a doctor’s care and he saw to it that I wasn’t given any work. I rested most of the time. For the first year of my illness I
stayed at home with my parents, and at the end of the first year the parish priest, Father Roe, an Irishman, asked my parents if he could adopt me. It was very hard for my parents to care for me properly because the doctor was ordering all kinds of special care and treatment, and it made it difficult as far as my brothers and sisters were concerned. My parents appreciated the offer so I went with him to the local presbytery. I stayed with him at the local parish until the end of 1946 when he was transferred to Australia.

I found it rather strange living in the presbytery at first, but after a while I got used to it. I felt very lonely because there was only the two of us, and I missed the companionship of my brothers and sisters. That was my first taste of responsibility. At that time there was a shortage of priests, and quite often he would go away and leave all kinds of money lying around, tempting me. I think maybe that’s what he was doing, testing me. Just before he left, he called me up to have a talk with him. He told me that he was quite pleased with me and explained that he had counted the money before he left each time. But I never had touched anything. I really appreciated that, too, because at my present job I handle a lot of cash. When business was good we sometimes had up to 8,000 pounds in the safe. Before, when I was single, I sometimes ran my account up to around 100 pounds, and I would want to drink and go out with the boys, but never once when I looked into the safe was I tempted to take any money out.

In 1947 Father Roe left, and he left me to be taken care of by the next priest, Father Walter. I was well enough to go to school again, but I was still under the doctor’s care, so Father Roe felt it would be best for me to stay at the presbytery. My parents lived only about seven houses away and I saw them quite often, but for the most part they left me alone. If I
went home for a weekend they treated me just like the others, the same as before I left.

I noticed a big change when Father Walter came. Father Roe was rather strict and hard—English-style discipline. Father Walter was an American, from a rather well-off family, I think, and he had plenty of everything. He gave me everything I wanted. Staying with him I got the idea that Americans have money to throw all over. He wasn’t so strict like the other father. I could go to the pictures, I could go anywhere I liked as long as I was home for tea and in bed at the right time. I enjoyed this time very much. I stayed with him until 1948 when I went off to the Marist secondary school in Mba.

Up until 1944 I didn’t like school very much and usually came in about eleventh or twelfth in classes of about thirty-five students. But after being sick, and staying with Father Roe, my studies improved when I started school again. He was a strict disciplinarian and kept me to my studies. When I started school again in 1946 I studied harder and finished first in the class. I realised then that I could do something. From 1946 until I left from New Zealand, I’ve never came in lower than first.

I didn’t like secondary school. In fact I ran away twice. As I said, I got to like studying in the few years before, but in this school they stressed manual labour instead of studying. Sometimes we would spend all afternoon until around 7 pm in the bush, and they’d expect you to study after you came home, dog-tired. On top of that, the food was no good and we had to work to feed ourselves. But each time I came home they telephoned Father Walter, and Father Walter would take me back. I spent three years at this school. After trying to run away twice and failing, I decided that since I didn’t want to lose my chance for education, I’d stay, and I adjusted my schedule so that I was studying from 4 am until 6 am. It
was against the rules, but I didn’t want to lose my chance for an education and I had to pass the Junior Cambridge or stay an extra year in that place. I knew that I wasn’t fit for manual work, and without a secondary education I wouldn’t be able to get an office job. When I ran away from school I wanted to go to the brothers in Suva, but Father Walter wanted me to stay under the Marist order. They, Father Walter, and the Bishop as well, wanted me to become a priest. After the second year, I took the Junior Cambridge exam and received a credit pass. After spending the third year at this secondary school, the school was moved to Cawaci and I completed my secondary education there. After that year, in 1952, I passed the Senior Cambridge exam.

After finishing that year, I applied for the priesthood and was accepted. I was sent to New Zealand to Holy Cross College to study philosophy. I found New Zealand very cold. I was a bit apprehensive about going to New Zealand because there was a definite colour bar in Fiji, and I didn’t know how I would fit in in a country of all white people. I remember how shocked I was the first time I saw a Maori overseer over white men. I found that the people in New Zealand were different all together. There was no discrimination whatsoever. If the rest of the world was like New Zealand, then the things that people like Leslie Cheshire and people like that write about colour bar are not true. Also, the whole way of life was different. In Fiji life is geared to the natives, but in New Zealand the people have a broader outlook on life.

In school the only thing I had difficulty with was English. English in Fiji was taught as a foreign language to a certain extent, and grammar was emphasised. In New Zealand they treated English as if it were your native tongue and asked the students to compare literary styles. You would have had to have read many books before. I found philosophy very, very
interesting. It makes a man think. It’s just what I enjoy most. It’s all based on reason. There’s no formulas in it; I could never remember formulas. It was based on the facts of everyday life. I did well and came in first in everything except English and Church History. At the end of my second year, I had a nervous breakdown and had to leave college for six months. I blame myself. I had always come in first since Standard 6 and I wanted to keep up here. I also felt that a priest had to meet all kinds of problems—genuine problems and people from other religions who would try to trap you. I felt I had to have everything completely in hand, and I guess I drove myself too hard.

I got to the point where I couldn’t sleep at night and would lie awake night after night, thinking of unsolved problems. After many weeks like that I would get very touchy, and it got to the point at times when too much noise would make me scream. Half of the time I didn’t know why I had acted that way. I’d have a row and not know why I acted that way. The professors noticed this and had me see a doctor, and the doctor recommended a six-month rest. It was during that time that I first started to doubt whether or not I wanted to become a priest. I had been awarded a seat in the College of Propaganda in Rome but was left behind because of my breakdown. I was supposed to go after the next year, but I thought of how much pressure I was under in New Zealand and knew it would be worse in Rome. I completed the third year at Holy Cross, but having the nervous breakdown knocked off all my self-confidence. The Catholic Church would have had to pay for my education in Rome, and I was afraid I would be a failure. It was pride, I guess. Now that I think of it I guess it wasn’t a very good reason to quit. If my parents had been paying for it I might have tried. I asked the Bishop if I might complete my priest’s training in New Zealand and then go to Rome afterwards, but he refused,
and if you don’t take the Bishop’s word, they don’t permit you to go into the priesthood.

I tried to get a job and went to the Bishop to get my exam certificates and a testimonial from him, but he refused to see me and refused to give me anything. So I got a job in customs just like an ordinary primary boy, with no certificates to show. I started out as a license clerk at 16 pounds a month, and another fellow had a job as senior clerk for 80 pounds a month. He proved to be incompetent, and the comptroller of customs asked me if I could try the job, since I had more or less proved myself. So we switched jobs. I thought that I would receive his salary, but after six months I was still getting only 16 pounds a month and the fellow who took my job was still getting 80. This was because I didn’t have my certificates. When I put as a reference the Bishop, indicating he had my certificates, the reply came back without recognition. So I quit that job.

I went over to Burns Philp and told them everything, and they told me they would start me at the same pay as the government, 16 pounds a month, but if I proved myself they would give me a raise. I started in November, and in December I got my raise and was transferred to Rotuma. I came to Rotuma in January 1957.

My first impression of Rotuma was horrible. It was a change of life altogether. My relatives all came to me as though I could take all the money I wanted and they soon ran me into debt. I never even had seen most of them before. They would just come up to me and tell me how we were related and then ask for what they wanted. If I refused, they would say I was just a European.

I met my wife in the office in Suva. She was working at Burns Philp, too. I saw her several times before coming to Rotuma and we dated
a bit. When I came here we corresponded. I proposed to her through the mail and she accepted. We were married at Upu by Father Beattie.

Honestly, I can say I went too soon into married life. I was only out of college for a year. Here in Rotuma, though, it was lonely. There was nothing to do and no place to go. I just went from work to home. I didn’t really know anyone, either. Now we have two children and I guess I’m more or less adjusted to married life.

[Plans for future?] Keep on working supporting my family, I suppose. [Here in Rotuma?] No, I’d never have a penny to educate my children if I stayed in Rotuma, with weddings, etc.; we’ve participated in six weddings alone this year, and one of them cost us up to 13 pounds.
(Age 26)

I am the second youngest out of a family of eight children, seven boys and a girl who is the oldest of us. As far back as I can remember, my parents were very kind people. They treated us so kindly when we were small up to the time we all left school to help them. When I was small I seemed to be the pet of the family. My parents brought me different kinds of toys and even dolls though I am a boy and I always stayed in the house with Mother. I very seldom went out to play with other children in the neighbourhood. Whenever I didn’t feel like playing with my playthings, I always followed in my mother’s footsteps in the house. Of course I was to be found anywhere where my mother could be presented. I remember that never once did I disobey my parents’ words. I think that was why I became a pet of theirs. The older children seemed to hate me because they all noticed how our parents treated me.

When I reached the age of 6, my parents sent me to school. Most of the time in school I was thinking of my parents and didn’t pay much attention to my teacher. I preferred to play, turning around and drawing others’ attention to me. The teacher used to tell me that I was a bit half-witted; he didn’t realise that I was purposely planning to waste time. I really hated school. Years passed and I was still a lazy student. When I was 14 I felt great joy when I was told by my parents to leave school.

I was still like a child, never feeling like going to the bush to help Dad in his plantations. I was roaming like a 5-year-old child in our village. Many times I saw that my older brothers were angry with our father for this, yet he never spoke to me about it. Later I learned from my mother that I had poor health and that was why they were treating me like a pet. A whole year passed and I was still treated as a child. One day I was told that I was going on a trip to Fiji and there I would stay with my two oldest
brothers. My heart beat with joy and I wished the boat would come earlier than expected. The day came and I bid farewell to my parents. When I came to Fiji my eyes were opened wide when I saw the place was so different from my home. Day after day for two whole months I was to be seen in town. Unluckily, I got news that my dear dad was seriously ill, so I returned home on the first available boat.

I came home to see Father was bedridden. I was no longer a child. I was changed and became the best adolescent boy in the village. I worked very hard in the plantations, and looked after Mother and Auntie with her two children. After a few months I had to take another voyage to accompany my sick father on board on his way to the hospital in Suva. How sad I was when I looked at my sick father. While my father was in the hospital, I stayed with my two brothers. I then returned by the next boat to stay with dear Mother again. I worked very hard for Mother and Auntie. When Dad came home from the hospital I had already begun building a house of stone. But he was weak and unable to help me. People in the village saw me working hard like an old man and noticed my changed manners and chose me to be the chairman of the district’s cooperative society. I didn’t like it because I was too young to lead many people older than myself. It was very hard for me whenever we had a meeting or something happened to the society that I had to see to.

I began to make friends with the other youth in our village and to go out at night finding pleasures for ourselves. I met many adolescent girls who I felt to love but they seemed to take no notice of me. Maybe I was a bit shy and couldn’t speak to them properly. Then I met a girl and we loved each other, but when I told my parents they refused to accept it. I told her to wait until I could win over my parents.
After a few months my poor father died of this new disease called polio. How sad I was to think of him, treating me like a pet from my childhood until that time. I really felt so sorry, but it was clear to me that we are not the rulers of our lives. I really missed him. Not long after his death, I got married to the girl my parents had previously rejected. I didn’t care about my mother’s and other relations’ anger but fulfilled what I had dreamed about for a long time.

Now my mother is very kind to my wife and we are living together in the new house that I built. I am still chairman of the cooperative and hope to be a good person for the people of the district.
I was born of Catholic parents and am still a Catholic today. I was the sixth in a family of twelve. In our family there are nine boys and three girls.

My father’s father was a pure white man from the States. He came to Rotuma and traded in the early days with the natives and married a native woman. My mother’s parents are both Rotumans. My parents are both still living today.

This life story of mine begins at the time I first attended school and that was the Sumi Catholic School. I was in that school for only a year before my father sent me to Levuka. I was a pupil in the Levuka Public school and was boarding in the Levuka Hostel for about a year until we finally got a house of our own. I went to Levuka in March 1944 with my mother and three elder brothers. We were in Levuka for only two years—1944 and 1945—and then we moved to Suva in 1946.

My mother came back to Rotuma with another brother of mine, leaving three of us. My elder brother left school and was working and left me and another brother. We went to Suva and attended St. Felix College for one year, in 1946. At the end of that year my uncle from Vatukoula came to Suva and took me to Vatukoula to stay with him. I was in Vatukoula from 1947 until the middle of 1948 when I went back to Suva again. In the time I was staying in Vatukoula I did not attend any school at all, just stayed home roaming the countryside. My brother from Rotuma heard about this and he came to Vatukoula and thanked my uncle and took me to Suva and left me to board with another uncle. This time I went back to the St. Felix College to start all over again; that was in 1948.

By the end of that year I ran away from Uncle and went to board in the St. Felix College. Uncle had been very cruel to me and I could not
stand it, so I told the Head Brother of the school and he admitted me in the school as a boarder. My boarding there was £4/- a month and school fees were free, but we had to work every afternoon cleaning the classrooms and the school compound. It was not hard though, because besides me there were another three boarders and we all shared the work to be done. We had a timetable of work to be done that was changed every week. My elder brother, who started work in Levuka, got a job on one of the BSIP vessels and was in the Solomons at that time. I wrote to him and explained the situation and he was pleased with what I did. He sent me £20/- every month to pay for my boarding, clothing, and pocket money. I gave this money to the Head Brother to look after it for me.

At St. Felix College, I had to start all over again in Primer 1, which was very shameful because I was the biggest boy in a class amongst tiny tots. Anyhow, I was in Primer 1 for only one month before I went on to Primer 2, and I skipped Primers 3 and 4 and went to Standard 1 in that same year. I don’t know why Brother shifted me that quickly; was it because I was too old for that class or was I doing good work? In 1949 I jumped from Standard 1 to Standard 3, and in that same year I moved on to Standard 4. At the end of the year on our final examination I came sixteenth place in a class of forty-three boys. In 1950 I was in Standard 5 and at the end of the year I came third in my class of forty-seven boys. In 1951 I went to Standard 6, the last standard in the primary school, and was studying hard for the Marist Brothers High School entrance. We boarders were having night class conducted by the Brothers. By the final exam, at the end of 1951, I came in second place in my class of thirty-some students. The Dux of the school was only one point ahead of me. I got high marks for all subjects except in English, where this chap beat me. Nevertheless, I was very glad about the results, although I was hoping to
get the Cup for the Dux of the School. Our Head Brother, a Spaniard by name of Brother Raephael, congratulated me on the results of the examination.

In December of 1951, I came home on the Yanawai for Christmas with my parents. It had been seven years since I was away from Mum and Dad, and I thought it was time for me to go home since I had finished my primary education. I came home and, oh, I had plenty of fun here. I went around with the girls at night and by jeepers I thought that this island was paradise, for as is natural, when we young people get together and mix around together there’s bound to be something naughty about it. I eloped with one girl during that Christmas holiday and when it was time for me to return to Suva my mind was not all there. I was double minded whether I should go back to Suva or stay here and marry this girl. My father was very angry about it, but it was soon over because I just had to go back to school to complete my secondary education. Anyhow I went back to Suva in February on the Tui Cakau in 1952.

I got back to school in Suva and this time I was not boarding in the Brothers school but was boarding with an aunty in Suva. I came back from school in the afternoon and used to go out at night after women, because my holiday in Rotuma spoiled my head. I was thinking all the time about women in school, outside and everywhere. In September 1952 I received a letter from my parents saying that the girl [I had eloped with] had given birth to a baby boy from me. This made me very wild because I was ashamed to say I had a baby and was still in school. I was only 16 years of age at the time. I denied the baby was mine and so the parents of that girl registered the baby in their name, and still to this day the baby has not been re-registered under mine, although I am willing to say now that the baby is mine since I have settled down and am not ashamed any
longer. This little boy of mine is 8 years old now and is schooling in Sumi. His mother is married now to another chap.

During that year (1952), I thought I was going to go crazy. My mind was all mixed up. During the second term in 1952, I came in sixteenth place in the Form III final examinations. The Head Brother of the St. Felix College heard about this and was very angry about it. He saw me and asked me what was wrong and I explained to him the situation and he said not to be down-hearted: “Do your best; I know you can do better than that, my boy.” These were his words to me and they struck me very hard. So in the third term examination, I came in fifth place in a class of sixty-three boys. It was good news to the Brother again. He was very happy about the news of our exam.

I came home again at the end of 1952 for Christmas. I came home feeling happy, but when I arrived in Rotuma and went home I found that my father was very sick, just about dying and, well, I got very worried. During that Christmas I didn’t have much fun because I was worried about Father. I was getting ready to go back to Suva early in 1953 but unfortunately I didn’t because the manager of Morris Hedstrom Ltd Rotuma had seen my father about me working in the office. He said that his clerk has passed away that week and that he needed a young fellow to help him in the office. I had to go to work to please the old man, but it was against my will. My ambition was that when I complete my secondary education I would go in for doctor or barrister. Anyhow, I started work for MH Ltd on January 19th, 1953. It was not long after that they sent a clerk from HQ in Suva to Rotuma, and when this fellow came I left MH’s and went back to Suva. That was in May 1953.

I got back to Suva and was admitted to the Marist Brothers High School and continued my secondary education. By the end of the year I
was supposed to sit for the Junior Cambridge (Overseas) but I came back to Rotuma again for Christmas and this time my old man wouldn’t let me go back to school again and saw the manager again about me working. I started again in December of that same year and am still working for MH Ltd today.

During my time here, there have been a lot of changes. There have been three managers, and all the office hands have all got the boot except me. This is not a good story to tell, but still I will say just a bit of it. It was the first and the biggest thing that happened in Rotuma. There was a big court case, the firm and government against the manager and ourselves. They found that there was a large sum of money missing somewhere. We had two lawyers from Suva, one was for the firm and the government and one was for the manager, but we poor blokes had no lawyer because we couldn’t afford one and hadn’t experienced a thing like this in our lives, so we were all frightened. The case results: Three chaps got two years and myself nine months in the clink. It was a big mystery. Someone got away with it and we poor fellows, because we can’t afford a lawyer to fight for us, just had to take what punishment they liked to put on us. Nobody knows the real mystery of this case. I was lucky enough because the firm took me back to my old position again and here am I still working for them.

I got married in 1955 when I was 19 years of age. Our first baby was born in 1956, and another baby was born this year. Our first child was a boy and second baby a girl. I had a lot of trouble before I got permission from my father to marry this girl. My father wouldn’t give his permission for me to marry her because we are very close relations. She is a third cousin to me, but all the same I just couldn’t help it. I love her and we love each other, and that is the main thing. Finally the old people gave in and
so we married and are still living together now. We are having a very happy life together and I don’t think I will forget her as long as I live.
(Age 25)

I have five brothers and six sisters, and I’m the third oldest. I lived with my mother and father. Life wasn’t bad. It was a bit hard because it was a big family. My parents treated us very well. When I was about 6 years old, I used to go with my father to the bush. I would go and help him gather the nuts and he would cut copra. We would carry the copra back home on horseback. I liked going to the bush with my father very much.

When I was about 7 years old, I started school. I was pretty lazy in school. I had very little interest in it. But I still tried my best and for the first four years I always came in first in the class. That was here at Sumi. When I started Class 5, I stayed at the boarding school here at Sumi. The first year was very hard. We had to work … go to the bush and plant taro, and sometimes we felt like playing instead of going to the bush. We had to carry the food on our shoulders. I didn’t miss home very much because there were plenty of boys. I stayed in the boarding school for seven years, until I was 18 years old.

After that I went to Cawaci, near Levuka. I went to the college there for one year. It was very hard being far away from home. Life wasn’t very pleasant, especially since I wasn’t used to the Fijians. They usually spoke in Fijian and I couldn’t understand them. The studies, too, were hard. I was in Form IV. We studied geometry, English, a little bit of Latin and things like that.

After that year, I was ready to make up my mind to become a brother. When I first started this school I wanted to be a doctor, but I couldn’t advance in my studies so I decided to become a brother. Father Fahey spoke to me and convinced me to become a brother. So I was sent to Sydney for the noviciate. I stayed in Sydney for four years. I found Sydney very cold. I found life very different, especially the food. I found
the boys in the noviciate very friendly. There were five nationalities represented: Tongans, Fijians, Samoans, Solomon Islanders, and Australians. There were also two of us Rotumans there. I didn’t feel very lonesome because we had made friends with the Fijian fellows before we left. In Australia they spoke English.

After I finished with the noviciate I was sent to the New Hebrides to be a mechanic. The American brother at Port Villa taught me to be a mechanic. I stayed there for three years. I enjoyed this time very much. I liked the work, it was very interesting. I learned to fix cars and all kinds of mechanical things. When I left there I was 25 years old and trained as a mechanic.

After that I had a six months’ holiday and I went back to Fiji, and then I came back to Rotuma. I almost couldn’t speak the language; I had to learn it all over again. That was last year, and now I’m staying here at Sumi. I like it very much. There’s plenty of work. I think I’d like to stay here.
(Age 21)

All my life I’ve lived in the same village. When I was a child I was living with my mother and father and sisters and brothers. There were ten children in our family, five boys and five girls. All of us are still alive except my youngest sister who died in 1957 when she was 4 years old.

My mother and father were poor, but they were always very kind to us. They did their best to supply us with everything that we needed. Sometimes, if we asked for something which they could not give us at the time, they would ask us to wait and would get it for us when they could. They also did their best to teach us to be kind to each other and to other people, so that after they have died the people will still love us.

When I was 6 years old, my mother and father sent me to school. In school I learned how to read and write, and also how to behave in the right way. During that time I began to make friends with the other boys and I found out that if you have a good friend, your life will be happy.

When I was about 10 years old, one of my aunts came from Fiji and took my four oldest brothers and sisters to live with her, leaving me alone with my small sisters. In the month that they left me I felt very sad, and sometimes during that month I would think about them, and the way we had lived together, and I would cry. I missed them very much. I had a hard time after they left, but I got used to it after a few months. Sometimes, when my father was sick, I had to stay home from school and get food for the family. Finally I left school so that I could help my father work on his plantations. I knew that if he would work too hard by himself he might get sick and die, and there would be no one to look after my small sisters as well as their father did.

After I would get through helping my father every day, I used to go out with my friends. Sometimes we would go fishing together and
sometimes we’d just go for walks together around the district. One time, when I was working with my friends taking the copra to Motusa on the co-op truck, I had a bad accident. I fell off the truck and broke some bones and had to be taken to the hospital. At first most of the people thought I was going to die, and I was unconscious for two days. All of my family was praying for me at that time. They gave an *apei* [fine white mat] to the priest at the Upu mission to say a mass for me. I spent one month in the hospital before I was allowed to come home. Before that accident I used to go to church but I was kind of a larrikin boy—always going with the boys and doing what they did, even if it wasn’t right. But after this accident, and the way God saved my life, I decided to try to do my best to act in the right way, and I’ve remembered that right up until today.

After I came home from the hospital my father told me that if I wanted to go to Fiji, he would send me there for a holiday. I went to Fiji and spent five months there before coming back to my mother and father and all my friends.

Soon after I came back I started to go out in the evenings with my friends. We went to the shows and dances together and always had a good time. Then one day I met a girl whom I liked and I wanted to make her my girlfriend. I started to go to see her almost every night. Then one day she told me that she was afraid to continue this way because the people might find out and tell her mother and father, and if that would happen and I wouldn’t marry her, she would be very ashamed, and maybe she wouldn’t be able to find another husband because of it. Because I had been holding her close to me in my arms nearly every night I felt like I would like to marry her. Besides, when I heard she was afraid I felt bad, because she was my girlfriend and I didn’t want anything to hurt her. A couple of days after that I went to her again and she told me that I better
make up my mind if I wanted to marry her or not, so I went right to her mother and father and told them that I really loved their daughter and that I wanted to marry her. After I talked to them they said they would agree to it and let me marry their daughter. I came home that night with my heart full of happiness and love. I told my parents about it but they didn’t like it and didn’t want me to marry this girl. When the girl’s mother found out that my parents didn’t want me to marry her, she told me that she’d never let me marry her daughter.

From that experience I found out that having a girlfriend is very different from having a boyfriend. If you really love a girl and want to marry her, nothing in the world can stop your love for her. A girl can change your mind so you’ll never think of anything else; you’ll think of her every minute.

Two years after that (this year), I met another nice-looking girl. It made me very happy to be with her whenever I could. Just like before, I didn’t want to think of anything else but her every minute of the day, but now she has gone to Fiji and left me alone.
Chapter 10

Women Born in the 1930s

(Age 28)

There were many of us in our family in which I was the youngest. As far back as I can remember my parents were very kind, but they were strict and the family had a hard time with them. Whenever they said something, nobody could turn things around because my father wouldn’t stand for it. When he said something, nobody had a chance to utter a word. My father was so strict in character that many of our relations were frightened to come to our home.

My parents sent me to school, and when I came home work was waiting for me and I had to finish it before I could have a rest. My father was kind but hard to live with. We worked like boys whenever there was no school. I was more worried about home than school and, to tell the truth, I couldn’t study properly. Instead of learning, I thought of what was awaiting me at home, but I never grumbled because if my father would hear any murmuring I would get a good hitting with his belt. Until the time I left school, I was never promoted to higher classes. I stayed home to help my mother and to help my father in his plantations and look after the animals. I didn’t even think of running away because I knew that once my parents died I couldn’t have them again, and as the years passed away, the weaker they became.

After a few years with them, I got married to an older man who was a catechist and we stayed for a while with my parents. Finally I had to leave them. My husband and I went to Fiji and then to the Solomon Islands. There I found life harder than I ever knew; I met people of
different races whose customs and languages were so different from ours. My husband was far from home and instead of being kind to me he was worse than my father. Life seemed so dark to me, and the thought of home was always ringing around in my brain. How my heart yearned for home. Whenever he was tired or angry with the natives, he mostly came and took it out on me.

We stayed for many years on this island and we had three children, so when we came back to Fiji we and our children could speak the language. My heart beat for joy when I heard that we were to come back to Rotuma; home sweet home. We came and stayed with my parents and here we had another child, and for goodness sake, I got fed up with my husband and sent him home. He never changed his manners and I preferred to stay alone with my parents. He left, but since he was still a catechist my parents wanted me to go with him. I went to his home and yet he still was the same, so one day I came home and never thought about him anymore. Before he went to Fiji he wanted to bring our children with him, but I could not send the children away because they were my own and I loved them. My husband sent for me to come over and bring the children but the thought of him had vanished. My parents were both getting old and I had to stay and look after them. My dear father was so strict when we were small but now I was the pet in our family. I worked because I was used to working hard and I never got sick or felt lazy at all.

Now we are living together with my parents and my four boys are without a father to look after them, only my dear weak father and myself, and sometimes my brother-in-law gives us something to help us for our dear old parents.

Married life to me is a sad life.
(Age 26)

I was born and lived together with my parents and brothers and sisters. From 3 years old until the time I was 5, I had a very good time with my brothers and sisters. We used to play with each other and joke. Sometimes my father would punish us for playing too much inside the house, because we would crack the dishes or break the things that my mother had put properly. During that time I loved my mother, but I didn’t like my father because he used to punish us.

When I was 6 years old, I started to go to school. I liked school very much because I always passed the examinations and did well in my lessons, so the teacher didn’t punish me. Each year I came in first in my class. When I was 13 years old, I sat for the Fiji Secondary Examination and passed, and the teacher sent me to St. Agnes College at Nanroga, in Fiji, to study stenography.

I spent four years in the secondary school. I tried very hard and did well, especially in typing and shorthand. I consistently got over 90 percent in both those subjects. In the second year, I never failed an examination and ended up first in the class. The next two years I studied so that I could sit for the Junior Cambridge examination, but the Christmas before I was to sit for the exam my father asked me to come home to Rotuma to spend the holiday season at home. He hadn’t seen me for four years and he wanted me to spend some time at home before going back to school. Not only that, but he had heard of how well I was doing in school and was proud of me.

I thought it would be a good idea to take a holiday because I had been studying very hard and felt it would be good to have a rest before beginning to study again. So I left the secondary school and returned to Rotuma in December of 1932. But I still liked school and intended to
return after the holiday. When I got home my parents were very glad to see me and were very kind to me. The other people in the district treated me well, too. I really spent a good Christmas holiday that year and had plenty of fun. Nearly every night I went fara with the boys and girls. It was the first Christmas holiday I had ever spent in which I had such good fun. My mother and father let me go with the boys and girls every night. They didn’t mind because they trusted me. They said I had learned everything in school and should know how to protect myself from the sins of the world.

Unluckily, I didn’t know how the Rotuman boys trick the girls, because I had been at school and didn’t have any boyfriends. So I didn’t know the ways of the Rotuman boys. One night during that Christmas holiday I met a boy and he talked to me. He told me that he loved me from the first time he saw me. I believed him because from the first time we had met he always acted good to me and talked sweet. On that night he told me all about his feelings for me. I thought about the kindness he had shown to me and made up my mind to love him. I thought that he was telling the truth—that he really wanted to keep me—so I trusted him, but when he knew I was going to have a baby he left me.

When my parents and close relatives knew that I was going to have a baby they got very angry with me. At that time I didn’t know what to do and cried myself to sleep nearly every night. I said that it was my father’s fault, because he was the one who wanted me to come to Rotuma in the first place. My father really got angry with me and sent me to my mother’s brother’s house. I stayed in that village and got married in 1955. This time I knew how to make a man keep me for his wife. We have two children now, but I don’t really like married life. Unfortunately I have no choice because I’ve already spoiled my life.
(Age 26)
I was born at Upu in 1934. I stayed with my family, and my mother and father looked after me while I was young. At the age of 6 years, I went to school at Upu. When I was 12 years old I wanted to be a nun. At this time I prayed to pass examinations and to get things for me, and whatever I prayed for I got. That’s why I wanted to give my life to God. I felt this way until the age of 14. Every time I would go home I would tell my parents how much I wanted to be a nun, and each time they just said “Oh!” When I was 14, they told me that they didn’t want me to be a sister. So then I took it into my mind just to look for a job and to sit for an examination to find something to do. At the age of 15, I sat for the Fiji nurses examination, which I passed along with some other girls. Then I went to tell my father and mother that I was going to be a nurse, but my mother didn’t like me to do so. My mother said that if I wanted to be a nurse, I could stay at Sumi and let the fathers and sisters there pay my way to Fiji, but if I did they would not call me their daughter any more. My mother said to me, “If you come and stay with me, I'll do anything you want me to do.” So I made up my mind to leave the convent.

I came home and stayed with my parents for one year. For this whole year I didn’t do any work, and anything I asked for they would get for me. At the age of 18, I went to Fiji and stayed primarily with my auntie in Levuka. When I had gotten out of the convent, I felt shy to talk to people, especially the men and boys. If a boy started to talk to me, I felt like running away. Some people say that it’s easy for a boy to get a girl from the convent, because she’s not used to joking with the people and doesn’t know how to act with the boys. When I came out of the convent, I kept this always in mind and felt shy to talk to the boys. When I was in Fiji I learned how to talk to the boys without being shy.
In Fiji I was impressed with the differences between Rotuma and this modern world, and I felt that I wanted to stay here for good. I returned to Rotuma after six months. I had learned how to dance in Fiji, and I always felt like dancing and going out when I came back to Rotuma. At this time, if I wanted to go to a dance, I couldn’t go by myself; my brother had to take me. But any time some young people would come and ask me to do something with them, I would go. I had started to enjoy my life. After about a year and a half, I went back to Fiji.

I went first to Levuka to see my auntie (father’s sister), and she and I went to visit our *kainaga* in Suva and then went to see my brother at Vatakoula. We also went to Mba. This trip, I wanted to go out to dances and shows all the time. Even in Suva, however, I wouldn’t go anywhere alone, because I was frightened of the boys. Even if a boy would touch me or try to talk with me, I would run away and my body would feel all bad. When I think of what would happen to the girls who come out of the convent, I would feel frightened.

I came back to Rotuma when I was about 21 years old. At this time, my mother and father trusted me to take care of myself, and they would let me go out alone. They would just tell me to take care of myself before I left and asked me if I had a good time when I returned.
(Age 25)

My father and mother separated when I was 3 years old, and I stayed with my mother. My mother was very poor, so if she wanted something she had to cut copra to get money to get it. My mother got married again several times, and I always stayed with her. All of my stepfathers were very kind to me, but still it wasn’t like having my own father. I had to show respect to my stepfather. I was small, but I was old enough to know what’s good and what’s bad. I knew they weren’t my real fathers, so I was afraid to ask them for the things I wanted. So if I ever wanted anything I would tell my mother instead, and she would tell her husband.

My mother sent me to school but I only went up to Class 3, because I couldn’t get money to pay for it and all the things I needed for school. I was afraid to ask my stepfather for the money I needed.

I came out from school, but still I couldn’t act to my stepfather like it would have been with my real father, so I lived unhappily until I was 19 years old. Since I turned 19, until now, I have been very happy, because I can do what I want without worrying about anything.

Unluckily, when I went to Fiji in 1958 to work for a Rotuman couple, I met a man who acted very kind to me. At first I didn’t love him, but he was so kind to me that in the end I did. He always talked sweetly and kindly to me and in the end I had a baby from him. I wanted to stay with him in Fiji, but the Rotuman man I was staying with didn’t like that man, and they sent me back to Rotuma.
(Age 24)

I was the second oldest in a family of four children. We were all girls, without a brother. When I reached the age of knowing reason, I can remember that there were only two of us with our parents. We had good times with our parents; they were very nice to us. They treated us so kindly that I never thought of going to stay with any other relatives, as some other children used to do in our neighbourhood. Whatever my sister and I asked from our parents they always gave to us, and if it was hard for them to give it to us immediately they tried their very best to get it from somewhere.

Mother was so nice, she always took us with her any place she would go. She never used harsh words on us or even scolded us once. She was so kind that I never thought of disobeying her words. She brought us many different toys to play with so that we wouldn’t roam about in the village like other children.

Both my sister and I went to school and our dear mother had to bring our lunch every day. Our home was not far from school, so every day before the lunch bell rang I could see our mother coming with our food and waiting for us. I took pleasure in school and did every lesson my teacher had given to our class. I tried my very best and every year I was promoted to a higher class until I reached Class 6, the highest class in our school. At the end of the year I was one of the pupils who passed and was to be promoted to Class 7, so my parents sent me to Fiji for higher education.

I entered Delainavesi School and there I found studies harder than I expected. Nevertheless I was brave enough to face all difficulties that I was to meet during my years at boarding school. I spent a year in Class 7 and two years in Class 8, but I barely passed my Qualifying Examination.
I thought of leaving school and going to work to earn a living, because I felt I wouldn’t be able to do well if I kept on studying. I wrote over to my parents and told them that I intended to become a nurse and they gave their agreement. I applied to the matron at the Civic War Memorial Hospital in Suva, and my heart jumped for joy when I found out that I was accepted.

As a training nurse I had to try hard to learn how to treat the different kinds of people who came in for attention. Being so shy of people actually caused a delay in my training. I was so slow in my work that the matron had to speak to me every month. I met with both good and bad times, but since I loved the work I tried my very best to do well and to do as I was told. I was good in my studies, of course, but the work in the hospital with the sick was a bit hard for me because I wasn’t used to being in the view of so many people. I was an adolescent girl then, and being in the constant company of boys who were studying to be doctors, I began to think of making boyfriends.

I met a boy who had the same thoughts as I had, so one day we met each other and said how we felt about each other. We became friends and from then on my shyness began to leave me and I was able to face many people and knew how to speak to them. When I reached the end of my third year of training, I sat for my last exam and was one of the six who made it through. I was so glad that I took a trip to Rotuma to tell my parents about my happiness and returned to Fiji on the same boat. After that I worked in the hospital, but my intentions were to work for my native land and my people, and then one day my dreams came true. I was called to go and work for my people in Rotuma. Gee! How my heart beat with joy when I was on my way to my native land. This is very hard work, of
course, but since I love it, I look upon everything as easy. As for my boyfriend, I left him as soon as I noticed that he had bad manners.

Now I am working in the hospital in my native land and I enjoy working for my people. I try to treat them all the same, and I often relieve the doctor with cases that I know how to handle. I learned how to drive, and whenever the doctor is too busy to go around the island visiting the sick I take the ambulance and see the sick people instead of him.

My parents are both living and I have a good chance to look after them. My eldest sister was married and has had six children, and my younger sister just got married at the beginning of this year. The youngest is still at school; I hope she is successful like the rest of us. My parents are now becoming old, but they have two sons-in-law looking after them and I am giving them some help, so they are able to do whatever they wish. I am very lucky to have parents now so that I can treat them with the kindness they treated me with from the time I was small until the day I left for Fiji. Now that I have achieved my goal, I want to help them to have everything they need. I also hope that what I am doing is helping my people on this island of ours. I don’t think of married life any more but would rather stay single and help the sick in the hospital and on different parts of the island whenever I am needed.
Chapter 11

Men (Birthyear Unknown)

(Man 1)

I was the eldest of the three of us—myself and my two sisters. The youngest died when she was about 3 years old. I was brought up by my father’s brother and his wife. They had no children but myself with them. They really loved me as if I were their real son. Whatever I asked for they always gave to me, so that I wouldn’t think of my parents. How nicely and kindly they took care of me because of my withered hand. My aunt used to dress me and do for me whatever I wanted to do for myself but couldn’t, because I was unable to.

They sent me to school, but sometimes I didn’t go, because even after I had reached the age of 8 years old I still couldn’t dress myself, and anytime I wanted to go to the toilet I had to go straight home. After three years of being a day pupil I went to the boarding school. My auntie had to come every morning to the dormitory to dress me for church and for school, and then she returned home. She did this for me until I was able to take care of myself.

In school, the teacher always scolded me because I always did what I wanted, whether it was during a lesson or not. I found out that it was a bit hard for me to learn, so I told my uncle and aunt and they just told me to do my best. When I was 14 years old, I was sent home from school for not having been promoted. But my aunt and uncle knew I had done my best. I had spent six years in the boarding school.

My aunt and uncle still had no children so there were only the three of us in the family. I helped my uncle with his plantations and then I
began to know how to work and help him properly, so one day he went away to Fiji leaving me to feed my aunt and take care of her. After a few months we received a telegram telling us that he had died in the hospital. What a pity to see my aunt crying, and both of us knew we couldn’t see his face again. I felt very sad, for I knew if I were staying with my parents I wouldn’t have gotten everything I got from my uncle and aunt.

One day my auntie took me back to my father, but by then my mother had died and my father had gotten married again. His wife was planning to go to Fiji at that time. I would have liked to go with her but she said that it would be too expensive for the two of us to go, so I’d have to wait. She went by the next trip and hadn’t yet returned to Rotuma when, unluckily, my father died. When my stepmother came back she returned to her own village, and I was left alone in our home. I went to stay with some of my near relations, but since I couldn’t work properly—only with one hand—they always looked down on me, so one day I went to one of the storekeepers and asked if I could work for him for a little payment, so that I wouldn’t have to stay with any of my relations and could support myself. I did work in his plantations, planting everything he told me to, and during the first six weeks he paid me ten shillings a week—but I did all his work in the plantations. I sold food and fruits for him and when I’d come back he’d take all the money I had gotten and would go away without a word. When I wanted something I had to ask him for it, and yet I was still doing all his work. Many times he told me that I should wait for him on the plantation—that he would bring my food up—but the whole day and night he didn’t come, and I would go all day without food. I was badly treated by that man, and many times he knew I was angry at him from the looks I gave him. I left this cruel man and went to live with my sister and her husband. That man is now old but he hasn’t been able to
get anyone to work for him, because all the neighbours know how badly he treated me.

But my sister’s mother-in-law didn’t want me to live with them, so I had to go and find another home for myself. Now I am working for a little payment at the Sumi Catholic mission and have enough food. It’s just like it was when I was with my uncle and aunt.
(Man 2)

I was the only one in my family and grew up very lonely. When I reached the age of reason, my mother told me that my father had died when I was 5 months old and that she was bringing me up without a father. When I was 8 years old, my mother got married again. My stepfather took care of me from that time and didn’t want me to go to my mother’s relatives. He gave me everything I needed, as well as toys and whatever he thought might please me. I went to school and he bought me everything I needed for school. I grew older and sometimes went to school, but sometimes I didn’t reach the place. I would play on the road and come back pretending that I was coming back from school. I acted this way and by the time I was 14 I was still in the lower grades, so I was asked to leave school and to go with my stepfather to work. He wanted me to be a carpenter and sent me over to that department, which he was in charge of. Every day I became very drunk and he became very wild with me. By then my mother died and left me with my stepfather.

Two years after my mother’s death this man married again, but he still kept me with him. Through my stupidity I lost control of myself over liquor and I knew my stepfather was very angry with me, but since he brought me up he might have loved me anyway.

Being with the other adolescent boys, we used to take strolls every evening, and one day I met a girl that I wanted to make friends with, if she didn’t mind. I met her now and then, and when I finally met her at a dance I began to talk with her. To my relief, she seemed to have the same feelings as I did, and so we became friends, and not long after that we got married. We stayed together for a year but I think because we were of different races and because our characters were different we didn’t get along well together, and one day I got fed up with her and sent her home.
During that time I couldn’t stay away from liquor, so maybe that was the reason. A couple of years later, I got married to a young woman of my own race, by my relations’ wishes. I wondered if I could keep myself away from liquor. As I became older I did, because my wife didn’t like me to drink or smoke. I had a hard time at the beginning, but I got used to it after a few months. When we had had two children, my wife got seriously ill and was taken to the hospital. I felt very sorry for her because I knew if she happened to die, there would be no one who would look after the children like their own mother did.

But she soon recovered and we lived together without anything to worry about. Now we have five children and they are all schooling together. I’m doing my very best for them and hope they won’t be like me when I was young. The children are sometimes very naughty and I scold them, but I suppose I was worse than any of them. I’m now working very hard for them, because I know that if I don’t give them what they need, they won’t have it. I’m earning money for them and if they want to continue their studies I will be able to pay for them.

When my mother died I was still a youth and not as wise as I am now. I knew that my mother would not be with me any longer, but I was not like the others—always thinking and speaking about her. It was the same when my stepfather died. After my mother’s death, he had three wives. He died a few years ago, but I didn’t feel much about his death, even though I did love him. Now that I’m earning so much money every month, I wish they were both alive so that I could pay them back for everything they had done for me.
Chapter 12

Women (Birthyear Unknown)

(Woman 1)
I was the eldest in a family of eight children. As far back as I can remember my parents loved all of us, but I was the pet. I knew they were poor, but whatever they had on hand they used to keep for me. They taught me to love my four brothers and three sisters and to teach them good ways, as I had been taught by my elders. I was the one who was supposed to lead our family to love each other. They also told me not to cry for anything, because they were poor and were doing their best to satisfy our needs. They really did, because I cannot remember ever crying out for want of something.

During my school years I did my very best in my studies. I was promoted every year from class to class and my parents knew how eager I was to continue my studies. By the time I entered secondary school there were five of us attending school. My parents tried everything they could to earn money for us, but still they were forced to tell me to stay home to let my younger brothers and sisters go to school. I stayed home to help my mother look after the others. I felt sorry the rest for I knew they would also eventually have to leave school, no matter how good they were.

I helped my mother for a couple of years, and then I heard that there was a European couple who wanted to have an adolescent girl to work for them, so I volunteered. I went to work for this couple, hoping that the money I would earn would be of help to my parents. I sent them half of everything I earned and bought them some clothes and sent it to them by mail.
While I was working I met a boy of about my age. I liked him and wished we could be friends. Then it happened that one day my wish came true. We became friends and I wrote to my parents and told them about this boy, and that we were making friends. They wrote back telling me to be sure to choose the right man—someone who would do his best to give me everything. They reminded me of how poor our family was and they didn’t want me to follow in their footsteps. I kept my eye on this boy’s ways and when I knew that he was really a nice boy we got married.

At the beginning I was a bit shy and I was afraid that my husband might change his mind, and then my parents would be very angry at me. We still went to dances and shows, but I knew that I was living in a different state of life than before I was married. Every day I would think of the time when I was single. I had never made my parents or anyone else angry with me, and I wondered how my husband and I were going to be. Sometimes I was a bit scared because I did not want us to have a row for useless matters. In spite of all my funny ideas and thoughts my husband was the same from then up to now. He was a very kind man to me and towards my parents. We stayed together for many years, but unluckily we had no children. We were getting older and yet we had only our adopted son, my husband’s nephew. My husband died a few years ago, leaving me with this boy whom I have taken care of and loved as if he were my own son.

On the day my husband died, I thought I would go mad. I knew he really loved me because when we first got married I thought we might be like others—some people who get married and have rows after four or five months—but this didn’t happen to us. He was nice to me from the beginning until the time he died. I felt very sorry for him and wished he would be alive so that we might live together with our adopted son. Now
there are only the three of us—me, my nephew, and his wife—and I do hope they will live happily together as my husband and I did when he was alive.
(Woman 2)

I was the oldest of my mother’s six children, all girls. Before I was born, my mother and her parents lived in my grandfather’s home in a different district. As far back as I can remember I was brought up by my grandparents, and I knew they really loved me because my mother was their only daughter. My grandfather had very bad eyesight and my grandmother was weak and crippled, but they worked very hard to take care of all my needs. They found every possible way to earn money for our living. Whatever my mouth might whisper they brought in so that I wouldn’t have to ask them again and again. Every toy I saw in the store and asked them for they bought for me. The neighbouring children who came to visit were not allowed to touch my toys. My grandmother hated to see any child touch my toys. I used to go and play with them in their homes, but whenever the older children would make me cry, if my grandmother heard it, she would come like a parrot and take me home. She didn’t want to see me cry.

They sent me to school, but because I was lazy I was just promoted to Class 2 when I was 10 and had to enter boarding school. Most of the time I didn’t go to school; I just stayed outside and worked for my superiors. The teacher didn’t care very much because she knew I wouldn’t be able to learn well like the others. For six whole years I was in boarding school but couldn’t read or write properly. I was really spoilt and became very cheeky to everybody who seemed to hate me. I came home to help my grandparents, but by then my mother got married and lived in her husband’s home and I went to stay with them. There were just the three of us in the family. My stepfather supplied us with food and all that we needed because by then my grandparents were old and unable to work like the time that they were strong. My grandmother died in the year I went to
I stayed with my mother. I felt so sorry because I knew she loved me and treated me so kindly when I was small.

My grandfather was completely blind by then and left the village and went to his father’s home in another district. After a few months he died of a sudden illness and I stayed with my mother’s cousin who also died shortly after, leaving me with a new-born child to take care of. The Sisters took the baby and I went along as well to look after the child. When she grew up, she went to be with her father and I went to stay with one of my relations. They loved me, but not like the way my grandparents did. I had taken a child of my auntie and brought her up to be my ward, but as soon as she was old enough, she left me and went to her parent.

I stayed with this auntie for nearly eight years and then I returned to my mother. How life changed living with my own mother. I worked whenever I wanted to and didn’t have to hear harsh words or see funny faces. Maybe I was too cheeky and the people couldn’t stand the way I acted or the way I used to speak to them or their children, but by then I felt like a heavy load had been lifted from my shoulders. Life changed from bad to good. I helped my mother with the domestic work and helped my stepfather cut copra. Never mind that it sounds like hard work—I did it on my own without anybody telling me or forcing me to do it.

I was sent to Fiji, but after nine months I returned home thinking of my dear mother, who had become old and weak. I stayed with them for another few years and they sent me again to Fiji. This time I went to stay with my half-sister who was working and wanted someone to look after her children. But because my parents were very old I only stayed for a few months before deciding to go back and visit them. This time I came home and saw how feeble and weak my mother was and felt so sorry for her. I’m now doing all I can to help her because very soon I will bid farewell to
them and do not know when I will return home again. I wish to stay but I have to go back to my half-sister who is now working and needs someone to take care of her children when she’s away.

I was very friendly with people from here and other villages where I had stayed before, but I never even thought of getting married. I prefer to stay single and be happy rather than get married and have someone I have to listen to or have to do everything to please him. Staying single is better than to marry.
(Woman 3)

I am third eldest out of a family of five. Two boys and the three of us are girls. When I came to know reason, I could remember my dear father’s teaching to us in which he wished we could grow up and become wise people in our district.

We were kindly brought up by our dear parents. They never used harsh words on us and there wasn’t one of us who did anything to make them angry. I had to play with my neighbours, but on the other hand my brother always accompanied me because older children sometimes made me cry. They left me alone and ran away to their homes, so I had to come back home to play with my toys, which my father bought to keep me busy, and yet I preferred to go out in the sun.

Father sent me to school when I came to the age of 6. During the first year I felt very lazy during school lessons and most of the time I spent playing and looking around and teasing the other children in the class to play with me. I had no interest at all in learning. For three years I came last in my class, so thinking of the money my father was using on me, I thought to change my mind. I then became a hard-learning child and so very eager to know my lessons and always ready to answer whatever question my teacher could ask. I did very well until I reach the highest class in my school, so I was told to go to Fiji for further education. My parents agreed and I entered the girls school in Navesi. There I did very well and at the end of four years I passed my qualifying exam.

Unable to continue on, I left school and lived with a cousin in Suva. I then learned to be a typist, but my father couldn’t pay for my learning so I decided to become a nurse. I gave my application and was admitted, so I became a training nurse. I loved the work and was very quick in studying what I was told to study. After the third year I got
through our exams and became a staff nurse. I worked in the C. W. H. Hospital for another year when I met a young man who was studying to be a doctor. We loved each other so dearly that we became engaged.

Thinking of myself, who really hated boys when I was in school, and then engaged to be married later on! At the end of that year I was told to leave for Rotuma to work for my people. I love it, of course, but hated to leave my fiancé, and felt very lonely and sad when the boat was sailing away from the wharf, where I could see the young man who stole my heart waving his hands to me.

When I reached Rotuma, I felt very glad to see my dear parents waiting for me with my brothers and sisters. I was kindly welcomed by all of my relations and my fiancé's relations too.

I began to work in the hospital in Ahau and spent the weekends at home. After a year, two nurses were told to stay at their house to help the others in the villages because there was only one doctor on the island and he really needed more doctors or nurses. I was the second nurse, so I came home to look after two districts. After two years at home doing my favourite nursing, I learned that my fiancé had gone to New Zealand to complete his course. I became very impatient after three long years of waiting without hearing any more definite words from him.

By then I met another young man whom I seemed to love whenever he spoke to me. I told my parents about it and they refused to accept it, so I pretended to obey them. When we had made all our plans to settle down, we made known our wedding day. My parents were really very angry with me but I wanted my dreams to come true.

There was no *kato'aga* on my wedding day and I did not wear a wedding dress. We just had a church ceremony. All this happened because my parents really hated the young man.
Now all my dreams have ended and I am expecting a baby, but whatever my parents had told me about my husband is true; he is showing up now and I think I will meet things I had not expected from him, and yet he seems to be kind to me.

My parents are still alive with my two brothers and two sisters. They are all married and they are all well now. At the beginning of last year, something happened that made me so worried I thought it would never be cleared. My younger sister became seriously ill and was taken to the hospital in Ahau and yet we, the nurses and the doctor, couldn’t cure her illness, so she was taken to the hospital in Fiji. I wasn’t allowed to go with her, and another nurse went instead of me. I stayed home, sending telegrams asking the matron in C. W. M. Hospital about my sister’s illness. When I got news that she was improving, it lifted a heavy load off my shoulders. I felt normal again and began to do my work as usual. Now my sister is home with her husband and she is as strong and healthy as one can ever see.

Now I am married and yet doing the same nursing work until I give birth and then someone is to replace me.
(Woman 4)

I was the only child in the family. I was not a lucky girl because I didn’t have a brother or a sister to play with and felt very lonely. I can remember that I was a real pet to my parents. My parents were of good family; although they were not rich people, they had enough to afford everything I needed. Whatever they knew I wanted they always brought in before I would ask them. Wherever my mother went, she would take me with her. I had all kinds of toys at home. My parents bought them so that I wouldn’t cry for other children’s toys. The children from the neighbourhood came sometimes, but when they quarrelled about my toys my mother always sent them home. She told me not to give my toys to them when they come but since I loved children to play with me I always called them and gave them my toys so that I might have friends with me every day.

When I reached the age of 6 my parents sent me to school. I wasn’t old enough to know how to care for myself and I can remember that my dear mother had a rough time with me. Every day I had to change my school dress even though school was only half a day. It began at half past seven and lasted until twelve noon, then off we went home for the rest of the day. I took no pleasure at all in learning, so during my first two years I stayed in one class. When I reached the age of 10, I was forced to leave my parents and go to a boarding school. I was a real spoilt child; I never knew how to work, even to wash dishes. Many a time I thought of my mother and thought of running home but I was frightened of my superior. Every time I saw my mother I always cried but she just encouraged me because there were many other children who were living away from their parents. My mother used to tell me to study hard so that one day one of us might be a clerk in an office or someone important somewhere else on this island,
so I began to study hard and made up my mind not to play in school anymore.

After a few years I reached Class 7, and at the end of the year one of the sisters who was a training nurse in Suva visited our school. She looked very kind and when she spoke of the training she was receiving I made up my mind to join her if possible. Two of us gave our applications to her. She returned next year and we were both called to join the nurses’ training in Suva. I was filled with joy when I told my mother about it.

By then my poor dad was dead and mother was alone with me. I felt very sad because he had been so kind and afforded me all I needed and there was not one thing I ever wanted that he didn’t get for me. Dear mother got married again and I was just the same to my stepfather. He was as kind as if I were his own child. He did as my mother told him and when I wanted something he tried his best to get it for me. He was the one taking care of mum and me when I was ready to leave for the nurses’ training. He got for me all the clothes that I needed and when the boat came, my friend and I left for our new home in Suva. There I was new to everybody in my new family and I was a bit frightened. The worst thing was that I couldn’t speak English properly and always thought of home. Three months passed before I got used to the place and the people, and then I lived as if I were with my poor mum.

I found studies becoming harder and harder and many times I failed my exams, but still I loved the work and studied much harder. I attended different races in the hospital and the only thought that came into my mind was that I wanted to work for my people in Rotuma. After four years of hard studies I became a staff nurse and yet still worked with my friends in the hospital. I was thinking of going home to work for my own people and one day my dreams came true. I left Suva for my
homeland and came to the hospital in Ahau. There were about six of us taking care of the sick in the hospital and visiting the sick in their homes around the island.

While working there I met with many boys who seemed to attract my thoughts. But I didn’t dare try to make friends, for I knew it would be useless to get married to a roamer and in the end I would be sorry for myself. After two years in the hospital I was sent to look after two districts. I lived in my own home and visited homes in the two districts and gave the people whatever they needed and treated their sores.

While there I met a young man who was a teacher in the mission. When we met together I knew I loved him and that he loved me. I knew I would be well cared for if I married him, so in a few months time we made our dreams come true. We got married and lived in my home. People always gossiped about us because my husband had been a cheeky boy, but since he knew that he was now in a different stage of life he changed his manners and became a very good man towards me and my parents. He was kind, and whatever I asked of him he provided. People seemed to be jealous of us and said nasty words about us, but I never cared about it. I just did my work and acted the same to everybody who might come and call for me.

My husband and I had a daughter and I had a rest for a year. Then I began to engage again and yet I am still the same to my people. I always go with my husband whenever there is a call during the night. He helps me sometimes in my work and yet people seem to hate us; I wonder why! I am doing my best to help them and attend to the sick when I am called for, yet they don’t realize it. It’s nice to think that I am working for my own people at home.
(Woman 5)

I was the youngest of the seven children. I can remember that my parents treated us so kindly but of course I was the youngest and I was the pet. My mother always took me wherever she went. They both were very kind and used to teach my elder brothers and sisters every kind of light work that children could do—how to keep the dormitory and surroundings clean, and my eldest sister to wash our clothes. They wanted us to love each other, especially when they were out of sight. It was a great pity for us when our mother died and left us with our father. I was in my third year in school when she died. From then on my eldest sister, who was old enough, managed our family. I was very poor in knowledge and had a hard time with my teacher. I tried my best but I had only reached Class 6 when I was fifteen, so I chose to leave school although I loved learning.

At that time there were only three of us left with our father. The others got married and stayed with their wives and husbands. I began to make friends with my neighbours and my thoughts began to wander and to think of worldly joy, and then I began to make boyfriends. In the beginning I was very ashamed and feared my father would find out about it. He was still kind to us and warned the three of us to look for the right wife or husband. I then took my chance and chose the right man for me.

For the first few months we showed love and respect to each other as if we would never be angry with one another. We stayed peacefully as if everything in this whole world belonged to us. We went to dances and cinemas, but then we stopped acting as before. Now that we were married we had to act as a gentleman and a lady or else everybody would gossip about us. We have had many children and I realize that my parents must have had a really hard life with the seven us. I had to do all the work for my children and not one of them could help either me or their father. I am
doing my best to give them everything they need. I always give them my advice so that they would be smart in school and study hard because I know that this is the easier way to a better life. Unless one gets a good job, he or she has to cut copra and plant to earn a living, and I do hope all my children will take the right path and lead a good life.

I was not wise enough when my mother died but I still was very sad. I knew that I couldn’t have her back again and if anybody took her place they would never be like her. My father is with us now but he is weak and feeble and I have to take good care of him. He got seriously ill once and I thought I’d lose him. I was so worried that I couldn’t do my work properly but now he has recovered and is staying with me. I wish neither of us would die so that I may have the chance to treat him the way he treated me when I was young. I was very lucky to have such good and kind parents, but unfortunately only my father is living up to now, while my mother died before I could look after myself properly.
Part 2

Life Stages on Rotuma, 1890–1960
Chapter 13
Childhood

A striking feature of life on Rotuma is the extent to which children were generally indulged by parents and grandparents and, frequently, by other kin as well. They were often being fed first and given the best food, and they were rarely punished with severity. Children were regarded as extraordinarily precious, in part, perhaps, because high rates of infant and child mortality in years past made their survival problematic.

A number of Rotuman sayings gave expression to this love of children, or to a specific, pet child. Terms of endearment, as expressed by mothers, included ‘Oto finēe pupu (A piece of my intestine); ‘Otou le’et gou ‘es (A child I bore); ‘Otou fanau (The one from my womb); and ‘Otou manman moit (My little bird). Specially favoured children were alluded to in the sayings ‘On mean mat het (One’s wet turmeric powder) and ‘On joan ru he (One’s painful sore [from yaws]).

The life story accounts reveal some pervasive themes and significant variations in the childhood experiences of Rotumans growing up in the period we are concerned with in this book. Variations include the size and composition of households within which individuals were raised, the wealth and status of families within the community, the nurturing and disciplinary roles that different individuals played in the children’s socialization, and the emotional overtones that these adults attributed to their childhood recollections.
Household Size and Structure

A number of variables affected the size and form of households in which children were raised during the first six decades of the twentieth century: a high birth rate, changing rates of infant and child mortality, the longevity of older adults, the deaths of one or both parents, and parental separations and divorces.

The birth rate remained high throughout the period at 40+ per 1,000, while death rates ranged from a high of 81.3 per 1,000 in 1910–1914 (primarily as a result of a devastating measles epidemic in 1911)\(^2\) to a low of 8.6 per 1,000 in 1955–1959 (primarily as a result of introduced wonder drugs such as penicillin). Infant mortality ranged from a high of 524.4 in 1911 to a low of 34.5 in 1959. The combination of a steady birth rate and a falling death rate resulted in an increase of Rotuma’s overall population from 2,112 in 1921 to 2,993 in 1956 (and an increase in the number of Rotumans in Fiji overall, including Rotuma, from 2,164 in 1921 to 4,471 in 1956) (figures from the 1956 Fiji Census).

Table 1
Number of Women by Age Group and Number of Living Children (Rotuma 1956)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Age of Mother</th>
<th>no children</th>
<th>1-3 children</th>
<th>4-6 children</th>
<th>7-8 children</th>
<th>9 or more children</th>
<th>Total No. of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1, extracted from page 160 of the 1956 Fiji Census, provides a general idea of the range of family sizes at the time, based on the number of a woman’s surviving children in three age brackets. The actual number of children born to women was significantly more, but given high rates of infant mortality, particularly in the early part of the century, the number of surviving children was substantially reduced.

Among those who mentioned such information in their life stories, there was considerable variance regarding the number of children in their families, with six individuals reporting that they had been only children, and five saying that they were one of ten or more (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children in family</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occurrences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the number of children in a family does not necessarily correspond to the sizes of households within which children are raised because many households in Rotuma during this period included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as more distant relatives. A household census conducted by my Rotuman assistants in 1960 revealed the following variations in overall household size: 46 (11%) households containing 1–3 persons; 158 (38%) with 4–6 persons; 141 (34%) with 7–9 persons; and 72 (17%) with 10 or more persons.

Of equal or often greater relevance than household size is the question of who is present in a household and who takes primary
responsibility for raising a child. While the great majority of households in our 1960 survey (80%) can be classified as nuclear (containing a married couple and their children), 27 percent of them included a grandparent and grandchildren, and 26 percent included nonlinear relatives such as uncles, aunts, cousins, namesakes, and more distant relatives or nonrelatives. In addition, among the 20 percent of non-nuclear (or sub-nuclear [for example, one-parent]) households, 9 percent included a grandparent and 7 percent included nonlinear relatives or nonrelatives.

A caveat is in order here: Household size and composition in 1960 almost certainly vary from the periods during which our life story tellers were raised, between 1890 and the 1940s, when population fluctuations on the island were quite dramatic. However, we can reasonably assume that the presence of grandparents and other relatives in households was common throughout the period insofar as it reflected the Rotuman cultural values of inclusiveness and accommodation. This assumption is supported by comments in the life stories by those who chose to live with and help their siblings, parents, or other relatives, or who, in their later years, came to stay with and rely on members of younger generations.

Also affecting household composition and the socialization of children is the death, divorce, or separation of parents. Among 70 individuals providing relevant information about their childhood in their life stories, the great majority (51, 73%) reported being raised in households containing both their parents; nine (13%) reported being raised primarily by their mothers, with or without stepfathers; four (6%) by grandparents; and four (6%) by aunts and uncles. One person reported being raised by his father and stepmother and another by nonrelatives whom he referred to as “uncle” and “aunt.”
Of Poor and Rich

Overall, the dominant theme in recollections of childhood is a concern for material well-being, both in the form of being well fed and in having one’s wants fulfilled by parents and other caretakers. Associated with this is a recognition of the hard work required by one’s elders to meet children’s needs and wants.

Fifteen individuals described their families as “poor,” mostly to emphasize the difficulty their caretakers had to fulfill their needs and wants. For example, a woman who was born in the 1920s gave the following account of her childhood:

I was the youngest in a family of six children, and we all lived together with our parents. They were very good and kind to us but we were poor, and sometimes we could read on their faces that they were worried about something…. My father worked very hard and tried every means he could to earn money for us. They used to tell us sometimes that if we wanted something and my father could not provide it right away, we should try not to cry out and should be patient, because my father was poor and if he could, he would get it for us afterwards.

Even in dire circumstances, expressions of gratitude for the efforts of parents to provide are pronounced in these accounts. As a woman born in the 1910s put it:

I was the oldest of three children who had different fathers and were brought up in three different homes. I can remember being brought up by my dear mother without someone to care for us. Poor me and my mother, who was doing all she could to provide us with food and to earn money for our living. She was strong enough to work like a man. I had everything I wished for and all the food I wanted. There were only two of us in the family then, and she really did enough to support us. She used to speak about the wealthy people and the poor ones; they live the same and death
came upon everyone, whether rich or poor. She always told me to keep quiet about the things that wealthy children had because she couldn’t provide them as I didn’t have a father to help her give me all that I needed.

And in more “normal” circumstances, a man born in the 1890s related that “our parents were good people, but they were poor. They did their best to supply us with everything that we needed. I know they were kind, because whenever we wanted something, and they were unable to get it at the time, my mother would tell us to wait, and eventually my father would get it for us.”

In a couple of instances individuals described their families as “rich,” including a woman also born in the 1890s, who related: “I can remember that nearly all the families in that district were my parents’ friends. I don’t know if it was because they were kind, or because they were richer than the rest of them.”

The notions of “rich” (‘es koroa) and “poor” (keia) families in early twentieth century Rotuma requires some explication. These terms relate less to any form of accumulated wealth than to available productive labour. To be well off, a family needed both male and female workers, given the normal division of labour, with women taking care of the domestic chores (such as keeping the housing compound clean, nurturing children, preparing meals) and weaving pandanus mats. Fine white mats in particular (apei) were the highest valuables in Rotuman society and central items of ritual exchange in nearly every type of ceremony.

Men were primarily responsible for planting, caring for, and harvesting food crops and for cutting copra, which was the main source of income for all but a few wage earners. Plantation labour and cutting copra was hard work, requiring considerable physical effort; if it could be shared
by several males in a household, so much the better. They would be able to produce more than enough food and income from copra to provide for a family’s needs and wants. In contrast, families lacking a productive male often found themselves in dire straits, with a single mother having to do the work of a man (and woman) in order to survive.

**Indulgence of Children**

As pointed out in the foreword, the Rotuman term *hanisi*, which is generally translated as “love,” refers less to an inferred emotional state than to an indulgent pattern of behaviour. What is remarkable in the life histories is the extent to which childhood memories focus on how children’s needs (such as food and clothing) and wants (for example, toys) were provided for by those who reared them. This is something Westerners might take for granted, but for Rotumans it is a way of indicating their satisfaction, and indeed gratitude, for the way they were raised. Mothers and mother substitutes were almost invariably described in terms of indulgence, as were most fathers, although in a few instances fathers were characterised as strict, punitive, miserly, or simply as less indulgent than mothers.

The characterization of stepparents was interesting in this regard. A man in his 40s commented that “if you live with your stepmother or stepfather they will treat you differently than their own children,” and a woman in her 20s, remarking about her sequential stepfathers, said that “all of my stepfathers were very kind to me, but still it wasn’t like having my own father. I had to show respect to my stepfather … [and] I was afraid to ask them for the things I wanted.” However, four others who commented about their treatment by stepparents (all of whom were stepfathers) were unequivocally positive in their assessments. Thus one
man in his 60s said that his stepfather “loved me very much”; a man in his 40s remarked that his stepfather “loved me [and] … took me everywhere he would go” and “bought me anything I would ask him for.” A woman in her 30s described her stepfather as “a kind man” who treated her like a pet and gave her whatever she asked for, and another woman (age unknown) simply stated that “my stepfather supplied us with food and all that we needed.”

In sum, the recollections of the great majority life story tellers were positive concerning the way they were treated by their parents and parental substitutes. This corresponds with my observations during field work in 1960 and during subsequent visits to the island that, in general, young children are indeed indulged and treated with considerable tenderness and kindness.

However, it would be wrong to portray childhood as universally idyllic; a few individuals recalled their childhood as an unpleasant time. For example, a woman in her 50s recalled:

> When I was still an adolescent my parents died and my brother and I lived with our relations. What a pity to see us. We didn’t know how to work properly to please our new family, so many times we hardly had enough food to eat. Sometimes we had only one meal in a day. We didn’t blame ourselves because we knew our parents had spoiled us and by then they were dead and we were badly treated by their relations.

Another woman, also born in the 1910s, was even more harsh in her assessment:

> Remembering the past times when I was living with my uncle, I think I was the saddest living creature ever to exist at that time. My poor mother was living with her brother and his wife, and I was with her. I remember well that I had a bad time with my uncle.
They had many children and yet they hated me like an animal. I grew up without knowing my father, and my mother never mentioned to me who and where my father was, dead or alive.

But these were rare exceptions to the positive tenor of the great majority of childhood recollections—that it was a happy time.

**Learning Morality**

A second theme in the accounts of childhood is the role that parents and other child rearers played in teaching children to be kind and generous, primary virtues in Rotuman culture. To cite just a few examples, a man born in the 1910s reported that his parents “were really kind and always told us to play and love each other, even to love our neighbouring friends, never mind that they would insult us.” A man born in the 1890s remembered his mother “telling us to grow up to love each other and not to fight, especially since we would have children of our own one day”; and a woman of about the same age recalled that “my two brothers and I … heard our parents’ voices telling us that we should be kind to each other [and they] also told us what we should do if we wanted to grow up to be good men and women. Every day they would instruct us about the right way to act.”

In counterpoint to this emphasis on proper decorum is the acknowledgement by seven individuals that they misbehaved in a way that translates as “cheeky” (*faktagata*). For example, as a woman in her 60s recalled:

Sometimes I overheard [my parents] saying that they should try their very best to give me whatever I wanted because I was their only child. I stayed with my mother every day, and when she would tell me to do some work for her I would usually do it, but if I
was in a bad mood she could say a hundred things and I wouldn’t do it. I became very cheeky and sometimes I noticed that they looked angry, but I wasn’t frightened of them.

And a woman in her 30s confessed that, as a child, she “didn’t know how to wash my clothes and [my uncle] washed them for me. I became a cheeky child and most of the people hated me for my pride. They said that my uncle and aunt petted me too much; that was why I became this sort of a child.”

In comparison with reports of indulgence, there are remarkably few reports of punitive discipline. Only a couple of individuals reported receiving “hodings,” which I interpret as some form of physical punishment. A woman in her 40s remembered being given hidings by a mother substitute “when she wanted us to do something and we did not” and a man in his 20s related that his father “would tell me something once, and would never repeat it. The second time he would give me a hiding, or make me skip a meal.” In addition, a man in his 50s described two instances in which he had misbehaved as a young boy. In one case his father gave him and his brother hidings for damaging their father’s knife while trying to sharpen it; in the other his mother hit him on the bottom of his foot with a stick for concealing himself from her.

But others who told about responses to their misbehaviour reported much milder discipline. For example, a man born in the 1890s related that his parents “would punish us if we did something that we already knew was wrong. But they were always kind to us and I remember that sometimes I was naughty but they just scolded me and that was all.”

Men and women of various ages described actions they avoided (inappropriate joking, grumbling, staying away from home too long without permission) so as not to be punished, and a woman in her 20s put
her incentive to avoid misbehaviour in reciprocal terms, saying that her mother “never used harsh words on us or even scolded us once. She was so kind that I never thought of disobeying her words.”

**Siblingship**

Insofar as families varied considerably in size, some children grew up in households with several siblings, others with few or none. Comments in the life stories regarding relations with siblings were relatively few compared with reflections about treatment by parental figures, but indications are that brothers and sisters were affectionate toward one another in general. Several individuals men and women, old and young, openly spoke of the love between siblings in their families, while others told of how they missed siblings who had left the household.

Nevertheless, there are indications that children with siblings had a sense of favouritism regarding their treatment by parents and parent substitutes. Thus, ten men and women of various ages described themselves as having been the “pets” of their families. Here are some of their commentaries:

*Woman age unknown*: I was the eldest in a family of eight children. As far back as I can remember my parents loved us, but I was the pet. I knew they were poor, but whatever they had on hand they used to keep for me …. They … told me not to cry for anything, because they were poor and were doing their best to satisfy our needs. They really did, because I cannot remember ever crying out for want of something.

*Woman age unknown*: I was the youngest of the seven children. I can remember that my parents treated us so kindly but of course I was the youngest and I was the pet. My mother always took me wherever she went.
Woman in her 60s: There were ten of us in our family and I was the youngest…. My sister and I helped our mother, but I had a bad leg and was the pet of the family. I wasn’t strong enough to help my mother properly and yet I did all my best to do what I could for her. My parents loved me as if I were a child and everything I would ask for was always given to me.

Woman in her 40s: There were five of us in our family in which I was the second youngest…. We were kindly brought up by our parents … but I was the real pet in the family. The others could cry for something and my parents would provide it in two or three days, but for me they were in great haste to bring it to me…. Many times I overheard … my mother … say that they had to do their very best and bring home whatever I would ask for because when I grew up I would be the most beautiful girl on the island, so they had to see that I wouldn’t be in want of something…. I never did anything at home, just roam, eat, and sleep, because I was the pet and nobody in the family was allowed to say something to me except my mother.

Woman in her 30s: I was the youngest in a family of six children…. I was the youngest and really was my parents’ pet. They always did whatever I asked them to do for me…. It came about that all the others had gone to school except me, and then I realized that my parents loved me much more than the rest. They took me with them every place they went and whatever I asked for they always got for me.

Man in his 30s: Because of being the youngest, I was a pet in the family. They treated me more or less like a grandchild. When I was 6 my next oldest brother was 16. If anything ever happened between me and my brothers, my parents would always shield me from them. If we had a fish that wasn’t enough for all, I looked upon it as my due. Of course mother and father would agree.

Man in his 20s: I am the second youngest out of a family of eight children, seven boys and a girl…. When I was small I seemed to be the pet of the family…. I remember that never once did I disobey my parents’ words. I think that was why I became a pet of theirs. The older children seemed to hate me because they all noticed how our parents treated me.
And although he did not refer to himself as a pet, a man born in the 1920s remarked, “I felt that [my parents] loved me more than my half-brothers and half-sisters. The way my parents treated them was very different from the way they treated me.”

Being the only boy or girl among siblings of the opposite sex also seems to have had its advantages. One man in his 20s, who was the only boy in a family with five children, reminisced about enjoying living with his sisters “because we would go to school together and at home we used to play and joke all the time. My sisters loved me very much and they always took real good care of me because I was their only brother.” And a woman in her 60s reported: “My brothers and father were very good to me; they let me do whatever I liked because I was the only girl. I was really happy at that time. I really loved my brothers because they always gave me anything I wanted. They used to take me to every kind of thing they used to go to—dances, makrotuam, tika matches.”

Reports of friction between siblings were quite mild. For instance, one man, born before 1900, remembered, “I was the black sheep of the family and whatever happened in our home I got blamed for it.” Another man, born in the 1930s, acknowledged that he would fight with his brothers and sisters sometimes, but he characterised it as “just the usual sorts of thing.”

Chapter 17, which focuses on parenting, provides additional insights into Rotuman childhood, particularly from the standpoint of fifty mothers who were interviewed concerning their child-rearing practices.
Notes to Chapter 13

1 The reference to turmeric powder derives from the earlier custom when it was used as a protection against insect bites and as an antiseptic salve for wounds. Children were smeared with turmeric to protect their skin. Yaws was a common skin disease that resulted in painful sores, and children would cry when they were touched. As Elizabeth Inia commented in Füeag ‘es Füaga, “The saying suggests that when a favourite child cries and wets the turmeric on his or her cheeks, the child should be given whatever he or she wants.”

Chapter 14
Schooling

‘Uam’ak sio te a’at (Dig your toenails in a bit harder)
A Rotuman saying used to encourage children to improve their school performance so they will place higher in their class standings.

—Elizabeth Inia, Fäeag ‘es Fūaga

A Brief History of Rotuman Schools

The history of formal education in Rotuma dates from 1839, when the Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society stopped there and left two Samoan teachers; the original purpose of schooling was to facilitate religious instruction. The Samoans were not very successful either as missionaries or as teachers, largely because they failed to master the difficult Rotuman language, despite the fact that much of its vocabulary is shared with Samoan. Tongan teachers of the Wesleyan mission followed in 1841 and fared somewhat better, although progress was painfully slow. It was not until 1857 that the first biblical translation was available in the Rotuman language.

In 1864, James Calvert visited Rotuma and reported that 1,200 persons were professedly Christian and that 230 persons were attending class. Later that year, the Reverend William Fletcher and his wife established residence on Rotuma. They supervised the teachers, who held classes in the various villages. The curriculum is reflected in a letter from Fletcher dated January 1866:

All the schools met, and gave us pieces of Scripture, after their own native style, and any scraps of geography, or history they had
managed to gain. All were well dressed. Evidently much pains had been taken by the teacher. Before people dispersed, I collected all the children together. I asked questions on Scripture subjects, added a few simple questions in arithmetic. The whole then chanted together the multiplication table. This was followed by a hymn, and with a short address and prayer, we concluded.

The Catholic mission also established schools and, by 1870, the majority of the young people were receiving a least limited instruction. For the remainder of the nineteenth century, education on Rotuma was entirely in the hands of missionaries. The pattern that was established by the Methodist schools was for the children to meet with their teacher in a schoolhouse three days a week, from 6 to 9 in the morning. School attendance was compulsory and parents who failed to send their children were liable to a fine. Teachers were supplied by the mission, but every Methodist household was required to give something quarterly toward the teachers’ support.

The Reverend William Allen served as a Methodist missionary on Rotuma from 1881 to 1886. In an account published in January 1895, he wrote, “All the boys and girls on the island can read, write, and have some knowledge of arithmetic and geography.” This was perhaps an exaggeration, for the 1911 census of Rotuma recorded only 1,331 persons out of a total of 2,293 (58 percent) as literate. Nevertheless, if allowances are made for very young children and those too elderly to have received instruction, it is apparent that the literacy rate was quite high.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Methodists established a school at Tia, near the main village of Motusa in the district of Itu’iti’u; it provided a higher standard of education than was available in the ordinary village schools. The school was run by European Mission Sisters together with a native assistant and provided instruction up to the
third standard (Class 3), although some students received education beyond this level. Promising students were sometimes sent to mission schools in Fiji where they could get advanced academic or vocational training.

The Government of Fiji took over responsibility for educating native peoples in the late 1920s. They established standards and provided supervision and grants-in-aid. Although the Catholics continued to administer their own schools after this reorganization, the Methodist mission relinquished its educational role in favour of government-run institutions. In 1936, school was made compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 14, and since then all Rotumans were supposed to receive a minimum of eight years of education. Failure to send children to school was made punishable by a fine, or in default of a fine, by short-term imprisonment of the responsible adult.

By 1960, there were seven schools in Rotuma. Three of these (two primary and one secondary) were Catholic. The other four (three primary and one secondary) were under government control. All the schools were coeducational with the exception of the Catholic secondary school, St. Michael’s, which was for boys only.

The basic curriculum in all schools was set by the Board of Education and was modelled after the Australian and New Zealand modifications of the standard English curriculum. The history and geography of the British Empire was stressed, with special attention given to the South Seas area that includes Rotuma. English was taught as a second language from Class 1, and by Class 3 or 4 most of the instruction was in that language, with Rotuman resorted to mainly to explain concepts. The available literature was virtually all in English; with the exception of the Bible and some government pamphlets, very little had
been translated into Rotuman. In addition to academic subjects, children received instruction in religion, and in the government-run primary schools a few hours a week were spent on learning traditional Rotuman customs and lore.

The majority of students passed each year, but there was little reluctance to hold poor students back, and a substantial minority repeated at least one class in their academic careers. If students progressed normally, they would complete Class 8 by age 14, after which they might leave or go on to a secondary school. If they had not completed Class 8 by that time, they could continue for an additional two years, up to age 16. Secondary schooling in Rotuma (Forms III and IV) was largely oriented toward passing the Fiji Junior Examination, a standard test given throughout Fiji. Passing this exam was a prerequisite for continuing one’s education in the more advanced schools in Fiji.

After completing Form V, a student could take the Fiji Senior Examination and, if successful, could obtain a School Leaving Certificate that qualified them for a variety of positions in government and private enterprise. Alternatively they could go on to one of the professional schools in Fiji, which offered training in such things as teaching, agricultural science, and medicine. All of these schools were oriented toward creating a cadre of professionals to serve the needs of the colony. Another possibility was to sit for the University Entrance Examination. If students passed this, they qualified for entrance to most Australian and New Zealand universities.

Education beyond Form IV was expensive and few were able to continue past that point. Students had to travel to Fiji and either live with relatives or board at school. Besides tuition and books, the cost of clothing and incidentals had to be considered. Advanced education thus could cost
several hundred pounds per year, creating an insurmountable barrier for most families. Nevertheless, many Rotuman parents were willing to sacrifice a great deal for their children’s education, and if they could possibly afford it they usually made an effort.

Given these circumstances, it is therefore not surprising that 43.1 percent of the adults over the age of 50 on the island in 1960 reported having received no formal education, while this was the case for only 9.3 percent in the 40–49 age group, 3.8 percent in the 30–39 age group, and 0.4 percent (one person) in the 20–29 age group (see Table 1). At the other end of the spectrum, 9.2 percent of those in the 20–29 age group reported completing Form III or above, while this was the case for 4.2 percent of those in the 30-39 age group and only 2.6 percent of those age 40 and above. Females were at a slight disadvantage, with 89.1 percent not progressing past Class 6, while this was the case for 82.7 percent of males, and only 2.7 percent of females attended Form III or above compared to 7.6 percent of males.

Data for Table 1 (on the next page) were drawn from my island-wide census of adults on Rotuma in 1960. The census questionnaire included an item regarding the highest school level completed. Comparable figures were obtained from Rotumans living in urban areas in Fiji (Suva, Lautoka, Levuka, Tavua, and Vatukoula) during 1961 and not surprisingly showed somewhat higher levels of education there, with 9.2 percent of females and 17.6 percent of males having a Form III education or higher.
Table 1
Educational Attainment by Gender and Age Group
Rotumans on Rotuma in 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes 1–4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes 5–6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>184</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes 7–8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms III–IV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms V–VI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The life stories collected in 1960 reflect this changing history regarding educational opportunities. Among the older generation (those born before 1911), many had no schooling at all or received only a primary school education. Some reported that, because “there wasn’t any school” when they were young, it was their parents who taught them “how to work and behave themselves” and “how to grow up to be good men and women.” Some of the older men remembered that there was school (up to Class 5), but they differed in their recollections about whether attendance was compulsory.

Memories also varied regarding what was taught. One Rotuman man in his 50s, whose father had been a catechist, recalled that in the village school he first attended, “the main subject during that time was memorizing the Bible, and simple addition.” A few years later, he started going to Tia, the Methodist school in Motusa, where his father was appointed to teach in place of the missionary sister who left the island:

My father … was in charge of about 100 children. I was in the top class—Class 4—but since my father didn’t know English, he only could teach other subjects, like history, arithmetic and religion. I stayed in this school for three years [until 1920]. Father was very good in arithmetic, and I learned it well, as well as some history and geography.

Among those in their 30s and 40s (born between 1911 and 1930), some had gone on for secondary education in Fiji, although the majority left school for good around age 14 or younger to begin taking on adult responsibilities, the boys working on the family plantations and the girls helping look after the family at home. Those in their 20s (born between
1930 and 1940) tended to stay in school longer and many went on to secondary, or occasionally tertiary education (university) abroad.

Particularly among the older generations, there seems to have been less incentive for women to receive more than a rudimentary education, in large measure because they were expected to spend time at home helping their mothers and attending to women’s chores in the household. As a woman born in the 1920s reported, “[My mother] sent me to school but I was a poor student and spent several years in school without getting promoted to a higher class. I felt bad to see my mother working so hard so I stopped going to school in order to stay home and help her.”

Attitudes toward school differed markedly among the life story tellers, with some professing to love it and others stating flatly that they hated school. Those who found the experience exhilarating often mentioned the pleasure they took in getting to know and play with other children, while others took pride in their successes in being regularly promoted and achieving high rankings in their classes. Some simply expressed a joy in acquiring new knowledge.

Among the reasons given for disliking school, and providing disincentives for attending, were learning difficulties, which often resulted in being held back in the same class, in some cases for several years, or regularly coming in toward the bottom of classes in accomplishments; punitive teachers who struck children physically for misbehaviour or poor performance; and a preference for spending time with one’s parents and siblings rather than with other children. Clowning in class, to the amusement of other children, rather than paying attention to the teacher, was also mentioned by some as a hindrance to learning and achievement. In boarding schools, both in Rotuma and Fiji, complaints were common
about being required to work hard doing manual labour as well as caring for one’s own needs, and in some cases the poor quality of food.

As students reached adolescence, some were drawn home to help with their family’s subsistence activities, while others were attracted to the freedom offered Rotuman youths for playful activities and courtship, leading them to drop out of school. Finally, a number of interviewees reported that they did not go to school, or dropped out, because their families were too poor and could not afford to pay the fees involved, buy school supplies, and clothe their children properly.

It’s important to recognize that attitudes toward school, and performance, often changed through time, depending on schools attended, teachers, and personal circumstances. As a man in his 20s (who later became a teacher) recalled:

I started to go to school when I was 6 years old. I went to the Paptea school. There were only two teachers in the school at that time. I liked it then. I think most of the boys and girls in Rotuma like school when they first go. You have a chance to play around with your friends. There were only a few teachers, so you had plenty of freedom. I came in first in Class 2, a class of about thirty something. The schools then were giving out better prizes than they are nowadays. I can remember that I got one shirt and a pair of pants for coming in first.

I liked school when I was little, but when I got to Class 3 or 4 they began to give corporal punishments, cracking you on the head for just about anything. At that point I dreaded going to school just about every morning.

For one woman (age unknown), change came about as a result of her realizing how much money her father was paying for her education:
Father sent me to school when I came to the age of 6. During the first year I felt very lazy during school lessons and most of the time I spent playing and looking around and teasing the other children in the class to play with me. I had no interest at all in learning. For three years I came last in my class, so thinking of the money my father was using on me, I thought to change my mind. I then became a hard-learning child and so very eager to know my lessons and always ready to answer whatever question my teacher could ask. I did very well until I reach the highest class in my school, so I was told to go to Fiji for further education. My parents agreed and I entered the girls school in Navesi. There I did very well and at the end of four years I passed my qualifying exam.

Those who went on to continue their educations in Fiji, or ultimately abroad, faced additional challenges in addition to being away from home and often family. One man in his 50s told of his experience at Lelean Memorial Primary School in Fiji, where he entered Class 4 at age 13:

I lived in a boarding house. We had one house for the Rotuman boys and there were thirteen of us. It was a bit strange at first; I had to do everything for myself—wash my own clothes, iron, do my own cooking. Everything except English seemed too easy for me because I had been studying them in Rotuma for the past three years. In every subject except English I did very well. I stayed in Class 4 for two years because of my English, and in the third year went into Class 5.

Another man’s experience at Queen Victoria School (QVS) in Suva three decades later was not uncommon insofar as Rotuman students often did very well in the end, despite the hardships of adapting to the new environment:

Going to QVS was totally different than anything I had known. I was one of the smallest boys in the school. You can imagine how I felt looking at the older fellows. My first year was horrible; as I was an outsider, the older boys always used to bully me. I made some
very good friends, though. Some of the big boys used to give me a hand with things. Besides school, we had to cut firewood and do an hours work every morning, before school, from 6 to 7 am. It was a boarding school. The food wasn’t very good; we had meat only about once a week. We had to wash our clothes and iron them. This was the first time I ever had to do this kind of thing and I found it tough. The big boys used to help sometimes, though, and the washing wasn’t too bad, although you can imagine how clean the clothes got. But the ironing was difficult, and sometimes you would spend fifteen minutes with a shirt and get nowhere.

During the first week at the school I got the measles and was sent to the hospital. I felt awful and missed my parents very much and the care they used to give me. I’d say I really missed home for about the first three months, but once you got to know the boys you tend to forget them. In the first exam I came last, mostly because I came back from the hospital only about three weeks before the exam.

The first year was preparatory and once we passed that we went into Form I. After failing that first exam I felt like chucking Suva altogether and going back home, but some of the boys encouraged me to carry on. It was worse because they arranged us in class according to the way we did on the exam—the person who did best in the back and the one who did worst right up in front. On the next exam I did better, though, and in the final exam at the end of the year I came in tenth out of about 35 pupils.

I spent seven years in the QVS, through Form VI. During the later years in the school I liked it very much and did quite well. I got through the Junior and Senior Cambridge exams all right, and during the fifth year I became one of the three house captains and head boys of the school.

For the few who went on for tertiary education in places like New Zealand, a whole other level of adaptation took place as they were confronted with an unfamiliar cultural milieu. A man who got a scholarship for teacher training college when he was in his 30s reflected in detail on his experience:
I left for New Zealand in 1956. It took me almost six months to adapt myself—particularly to the social life there. The college I went to was co-educational and residential. Social life there was very high—very advanced in comparison to what I had experienced in Rotuma. Here, there are a lot of restrictions between boys and girls, but there, there was almost complete freedom. I liked it from the beginning, but several things kept me out of the scene. One was that I was conscious all the time that I had been sent by the Rotuman people and I felt obliged to accomplish something and bring it back to them. My main aim was to succeed in my studies. The other thing that kept me out of the social life for the first six months was the attitude of the Europeans in Fiji and Rotuma for the natives. I felt inferior and was very reluctant to take an active part in the social life. But this inferior feeling gradually wore off and I began to make friends and got to know most of the students. I found that there was in fact very little feelings of colour superiority among the European students and the faculty. After the first six months I was very well adapted—too well adapted in fact.

I think that one of the things that made me popular there was the part I played in college sports. They’re not quite like the Americans, but they’re quite keen in sports. I played rugby as one of the first fifteen (first team varsity); participated in track and field—I threw the shotput, javelin and discus; I played soccer on the first eleven, and finally became a representative player for the South Auckland County provincial team. I began to take a very lively part in most of the social functions there. I went to nearly all the social dances and joined several college groups. At first I was very reluctant to partake in dating, but I was more or less encouraged by the friendly response of the girls. To be honest, when I started dating I was still conscious of the fact that I was different. I was always sure that a boyfriend of mine and his date were along. Soon I got used to dating on my own and my self-consciousness died out. In fact I got really used to dating, and perhaps I overdid it. I felt that it was an honour and a privilege to go around with European girls, since it was something that was not practiced here in Fiji. But even then I felt that it was just a temporary sort of thing. I was never convinced that any of these girls would ever be willing to lead an island life, so I felt that there was no sense proceeding with a romantic affair where one finds it hard to turn back. For me it was just like playing a game. There
were times when girls got infatuated, and mistook it for love. Maybe it’s because they were young—only around 19 or 20. I made sure to tell them the facts about island life and made it clear to them that it was hopeless—that they could never be happy in an island life. I considered staying in New Zealand to get an advanced teacher’s certificate, but I never considered staying there permanently.

In school, those subjects concerned with education I found to my liking from the beginning and I did well in them. I also took courses in art, science and English during the first year. The only thing I really found tough was English. I finished the two-year program and received the certificate.

Another man of about the same age was made more acutely aware of cultural differences as a result of his experiences in New Zealand:

After getting my teacher’s certificate, I was appointed to Queen Victoria School as an assistant master. That was a good opportunity for me because I worked with people who were experts in their various fields. I learned quite a bit there from the masters themselves. I taught three years there and after that I went to a training college in New Zealand; it was a two-year course. I studied in a general training program and one year of the university course directed by the University of Auckland. New Zealand was absolutely new. It was as big a jump from Suva as Suva was from Rotuma. The first year was quite different for me. The Europeans in Suva don’t mix freely with the coloured people. In New Zealand, the people don’t seem to realise you’re black or brown. There’s no colour bar. It might be there, but I didn’t suffer from it. The people were friendly. One thing that impressed me was the general high standard of living compared with Rotuma and Suva. The methods of teaching also impressed me. There was more freedom for the students. For example, if you strike a student in New Zealand you can be prosecuted for assault. In Fiji and Rotuma, the teachers strike the students quite often, even though there are rules against it. Also the abundance of material things, like books and general school equipment, like sports equipment.

I had about five months of student teaching, not all at one stretch. I taught European children, and sometimes the children
would tell me that their mother wanted me to come for tea, but they usually lived too far. European children are not shy. Even if you’re new to a class, if you ask them to tell stories there will be many hands up. In my opinion it was harder. First of all, they’re so active. You have to keep moving all the time. Rotuman children are not so very active. They’re very passive.

From the Teachers’ Perspective

While in Rotuma in 1960, I invited the teachers to answer a seven-point questionnaire regarding their teaching philosophy and practice. Twelve of the teachers, representing Class 1 though Form IV, replied. In an appendix to this chapter their responses are presented in full (slightly edited for clarity) as a way of offering insight into the schooling experience both for teachers and students. In addition, I have included comparable information from interviews at Upu Catholic Mission School with Father Beattie and Sisters Elizabeth and Madeleine.

The cover letter and questionnaire (next page) read as follows:

**Questionnaire For Teachers**

As a fellow educator I am very much interested in the methods used by teachers in Rotuma. I would therefore appreciate it very much if you would answer the following questions as fully as possible.

Please send them to Mr. H. S. Kitione, Malhaha Central School, well before our next meeting as I would like to browse through them in preparation for my next speech.*

Thank you,
Alan Howard

*I had been asked by the Headmaster of Malhaha Central School to give some lectures to the teachers regarding education in the United States.
1. Name of teacher

2. What class do you teach?

3. How many boys and girls are there in each of your classes?

4. Describe as clearly as you can the methods that you use to teach your students. For example, if you divide your children into groups and have the groups compete with each other, describe how the groups are formed, how the leaders are selected, etc. If you use different methods to teach different subjects, describe them separately.

5. How do you reward your children for doing good work? (Note: A reward does not have to be something material. Words of praise are rewarding for children, as are symbols like merits or ranking of any kind).

6. For what thing do you punish your children? (Note: Include punishments for bad behaviour such as fighting amongst themselves, disrespectful acts, etc., as well as any punishment for bad work. As in the case of rewards, punishment does not have to be tangible, but may be in the form of scolding, etc.)

7. As a teacher what do you hope to achieve? What benefits do you expect your students to get from your teaching? Explain as best you can the reasons why you chose to become a teacher.

Here is an overview of teacher responses in terms of class size, teaching methods, rewards and punishments, and educational aims:

**Class size:** Table 2 (on the next page) summarises the number of students in each class. The average for Classes 1 through 7 was 30 per class. For Forms III and IV, the average was a much lower 11. This discrepancy can be accounted for by a high percentage of children dropping out after completing the Class 7, either because they were quitting school or going on to Fiji to further their education there.
### Table 2
Number of Students in Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarote F. Ralifo</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily S. Emose</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauoro Olsen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosio M. Penjueli</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamarie K. Aisea</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ieli Irava</td>
<td>5b</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ieli Irava</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faga K. Solomon</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Inia</td>
<td>7a</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avaiki Konousi</td>
<td>7b</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average for Classes 1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisea Aitu</td>
<td>Form III</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Beatie</td>
<td>Forms II/IV</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iliese Atalifo</td>
<td>Boys’ Crafts</td>
<td>Avg. = 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiurie M. Samuela</td>
<td>Girls’ Crafts</td>
<td>Avg. = 12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Methods:** What is striking about the methods described by the teachers is the pervasiveness of groupings as a basic way of organizing classroom activities. Starting in the earliest grades, group work dominated, with children assigned to groups according to their abilities, and the brightest selected as group leaders. Although some teachers had the groups compete with one another, on the whole this emphasis on group work is a reflection of Rotuman culture’s emphasis on cooperation rather than competition,
and although students were rewarded for their superior abilities by being chosen group leaders, their roles were mainly to provide support for their cohorts. Bragging and prideful demonstrations are strongly discouraged in Rotuman society, while humility and making quiet contributions to group welfare are encouraged and admired. In contrast to the emphasis on individual achievement in so many Western classrooms, in Rotuma at the time it was commonplace if not the norm for groups of students to work together to solve mathematical problems or read texts out loud.

**Rewards:** The predominant type of reward for good work mentioned by the teachers was verbal praise. In the earlier grades, this was sometimes accompanied by showing one’s work in front of the class, eliciting applause from a child’s fellow students. Teachers of the more advanced classes also mentioned such responses to good work by featuring it in displays, moving children to honoured seating positions in the classroom, promoting children to higher achievement groups, or making them group leaders. Some of the teachers also mentioned report cards in the context of rewards. The only mentions of physical rewards were from two nuns who taught at the Catholic Primary School at Upu, Sister Elizabeth and Sister Madeleine. Both mentioned giving students religious pictures as rewards.

**Punishment:** Most of the teachers mentioned two types of conduct that provoked some form of punishment: poor work and misbehaviour. Poor work was generally attributed to carelessness or laziness and was usually dealt with by scolding, shaming, and making the student redo their work. Misbehaviour, including such offences as bullying, fighting, lying, stealing, using obscene language, and disrespecting the teacher, was generally met with some form of corporal punishment (with a stick or strap) according to
the teachers’ reports, although technically only headmasters were authorized to dispense such treatment. However, it is apparent from the life histories, and from different teachers’ self-reports, that some relied on corporal punishment more than others and developed a reputation for being harsh, while others were much more reluctant to administer it. In general, it was my impression that misbehaviour by the children and corporal punishment by teachers were not common occurrences in most classrooms. For the most part the students appeared to be well behaved and compliant, and although Avaiki Konousi expressed the view that Rotuman children were different from Europeans and could not learn without the aid of the rod, she went on to point out that punishment resulted in children avoiding misbehaviour and endeavouring to learn. She also commented that she was careful to avoid inflicting injuries. My interpretation of her remarks is that the threat of physical punishment acted as an effective deterrent to misbehaviour, and that when administered it tended to be relatively mild. Perhaps even more to the point was Sister Madeleine’s comment that “you can’t punish them too much, because you want to teach them to be kind, and how can you do that if you are not kind to them yourself?”

**Aims:** The main emphasis in the teachers’ expressions of their aims as educators was to affect their students’ character development—to nurture them to become good citizens of their communities and kind, caring human beings. Other concerns included imparting knowledge so as to improve the standard of living and health standards on Rotuma, and to cope better with everyday problems their students would face as adults. Noteworthy as well were frequent expressions of their love of children and love of teaching.
Notes to Chapter 14


2 Calvert’s comment was included in Fiji and the Fijians; and Missionary Labours among the Cannibals, by Thomas Williams and James Calvert (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870, p. 585).

3 Fletcher’s letter was published in the Wesleyan Missionary Notices in October 1866.

Chapter 14 Appendix:

Responses to Teacher Questionnaire

1. Teacher: Sarote F. Ralifo

2. Class taught: Class 1

3. Number of children in class: 12 boys, 14 girls

4. Methods of Teaching: In Class 1, the teaching of subjects like Vern[acular] Speech Training, V. Reading, V. Spelling, etc. and Number Work are based mostly on group work. The class is divided into four groups. The best child becomes the group leader. New work is taken with whole class, then work in groups. One group remains at the Blackboard while other groups move to places where various Reading activities or Number Work activities have been set out. The teacher must go round checking their work and helping the weaker ones. They change groups after a few minutes. For subjects like English Oral we use a different method altogether. This subject is entirely oral and no words are to be printed on cards or on B. board. The words are taught in sentences by dramatization, use of real objects, pictures, drawings, and blackboard sketches. Children hear the new word in sentences, and acting while saying what he or she is doing. Teacher asks questions and children try to answer. Later on one child comes in front and be the teacher and asks other children questions. They must not answer in unison. They put up their hands and teacher calls on one child to answer. They may answer together after individual children have already given answers.

5. Rewards: If a child does good work, e.g., gets his sums right, or answers the question correctly, or his handwriting is improving, etc., the teacher will praise him and let him stand in front of the class and show his good work to other children. The children will of course clap for his good work.

6. Punishment: The stick or the strap is given to those who behave badly, such as fighting, swearing, stealing, disobeying the teacher, or destroying somebody’s property or good work. For careless and lazy work, the teacher will correct the child’s work and let him rewrite it again.
7. **Aims:** My aims in teaching children are to enable them to speak, write and read their own language correctly, as well as other languages such as English, to help them solve everyday problems, and above all to train them to become good citizens.

The reason why I chose to be a teacher is because I love children and I like to help them, to work with them, to play with them, and to train them to become good people and useful in their own country as well as other peoples & countries.

1. **Teacher:** Emily S. Emose

2. **Class taught:** Class 1

3. **Number of children in class:** 16 boys, 16 girls

4. **Methods:** “Group Work” or working together in groups is the main method used in this class for most subjects. All groups are of 4–8 in each group. The children are divided into their groups according to their knowledge, e.g., by putting the bright ones together and the dull ones together. This allows the bright children to go ahead rather than having to lose a lot of time waiting for the dull ones to catch up. In other cases grouping of the class is mixed instead (bright ones with dull ones). This is done only when most of the class is found too far behind the bright ones. By doing this there may be a chance for the dull ones to pick up far quicker than by having to wait for the teacher’s help. The brightest one in the group is always selected leader for she is expected to help the others when in difficulty while the teacher is busy attending another group. All activities given for group work are introduced to the class as a whole first. In this class the groups do not compete against each other for each group has a different activity to do, changing when told. Groups are changed now and again. English Oral: This subject is taught by (a) Demonstration and (b) Showing or having the real thing or object. When introducing a new word the “Direct Method” is used, i.e. Making the children see and understand the meaning of the word by themselves than by telling them the meaning of the word in the vernacular.

5. **Rewards:** Rewarding in this class is mainly by praising them in front of the class, telling the class to give her a clap or allowing her out for intervals before the class.
6. **Punishment:** Punishments are given for:
   a. Forgetting to do their duties
   b. Telling lies
   c. Stealing
   d. Swearing or saying nasty words to others
   e. Fighting, etc.
Punishments are scolding them, kneeling them in front of the class, making them stand behind the door, keeping them in during intervals.

7. **Aims:** As a teacher I hope to achieve a higher education for the children of my people to help in bringing up of Rotuma and her people in future. At the end of each year I expect my children to reach the standard of knowledge expected for a Class 1 pupil ready for promotion to the next class in the following year.

1. **Teacher:** Sister Elizabeth [From an interview]

2. **Class Taught:** Class 1

3. **Number of children in class:** No information

4. **Methods:** At first I teach them to count and the alphabet in Rotuman, but soon after that I begin to instruct them in English. The main task of the first graders is to learn simple arithmetic and to understand English. I teach them mainly by games and songs, as well as a certain amount of instruction.

5. **Rewards:** If the children do very well at a lesson I may give them religious pictures or Christmas cards. I also praise them for a good performance. Sometimes I have the other children clap when one of the children performs well. Sometimes I put the child who does best in the front seat. The children like the front seat and try hard to “win” it.

6. **Punishment:** If they do poorly at a task, I show them how to do it. If they misbehave, I scold them and tell them the right way to act, but if they continue to act badly I may (1) use the stick, (2) make them kneel, or (3) make them stand at their desk in front of the others, thereby shaming them.
Sometimes I punish the children if they refuse to do the work. If they fight, I give them the stick right away. The small ones don’t get angry when you hit them because they want you to love them. They come right back to you. If they cry when I hit them I threaten to hit them again and they stop. It’s not good for the children to be frightened of the teacher, so I try not to hit them much. If they are afraid of the teacher, it’s not good because they won’t tell her things.

7. **Aims:** I became a teacher to help others. If you’re a teacher you help them—show them what is the good thing and the bad thing. I want to teach them not to be lazy but to be able to do things for themselves. I like to teach because I feel that what I teach them will help to make them good for their community, their village—to be good citizens.

1. **Teacher:** Sister Madeleine [From an interview]

2. **Classes Taught:** Classes 2 & 3

3. **Number of children in classes:** No information

4. **Methods:** The best way to get the children to work is to give them group work. This is especially true for the slower children. If left to work individually, the slower children get easily frustrated and stop making an effort. On the other hand, if they are broken into work groups, with the brighter children acting as leaders, the children do not get so easily frustrated. For example, I will have a whole group read together instead of each child individually. This way the slower children can follow along with the group. I find that individual reading skills improve by this technique. With arithmetic, I have the children give group answers to the problems. They have to work it out together and reach a single decision. After doing this for several days, I hold a competition between the groups—adding up the sums of correct answers in each group, this time having the children work out their answers individually. I find marked improvement in individual skills by using this group technique.

5. **Rewards:** I praise good work by one of the students in front of the others, and pet them sometimes when they have done good work. If I had punished a child earlier in the day I make a special effort to reward them if they do something good later on. If the whole class does well at an
assignment I sometimes give them some extra recess time—something they like very much. Sometimes, if a few of the children do well at an assignment I give them religious pictures as a prize.

6. **Punishment:** To punish children if they are bad, I usually begin by scolding them and telling them the right way. I always scold them first and warn them; the second time I also scold them but the third time I give them the strap. It’s not good to hit the little ones right away because they might not know the right way, but after I have told them the right way and warned them, I use the strap. For instance, when the children disobeyed me several times and ran to the bus before it had stopped I had to do something or someone might have gotten killed.

For school work I may punish the children for being lazy or not working well by shaming them in front of the class. For general work, the European system of report cards to the parents, and grading of individual assignments is used.

If children fight, I hold an inquiry to find out who started it and what happened. If nothing serious has happened, for example, if they were only pulling at each other, I let it go with a scolding and give weekly lessons in decorum, using breaches as examples. If one of the children gets malicious, like striking another child with a stick, I use the strap.

If a child acts cheeky to me, I bring them in front of the class and scold them, which shames them. They don’t like that and it’s a good means of control.

You can’t punish them too much, because you want to teach them to be kind, and how can you do that if you are not kind to them yourself?

7. **Aims:** Being a teacher is very important because it affects the lives of the children so much. A good mother can do a better job, but the mothers in Rotuma only know some things. The important thing is not only to teach English and arithmetic, but to teach them to be kind and friendly and to get along with each other. They remember what you taught them, and sometimes they come back to you after a year or more and remind you of something you taught them a long time ago and something you’ve forgotten about.

The children are very sensitive. If you show them love and affection, they will do anything for you. Even if you hit them they come back as soon as you show them some affection. I have a real problem with some of the children, since they get jealous whenever I show affection to someone else. Also, sometimes a child will cry when a teacher tells them to do something they don’t want to do or are afraid they cannot do well.
I love teaching very much! Children are wonderful and I can understand why the Bible teaches that it is easy for a child’s heart to find the way to heaven. You can learn a lot from children.

1. **Teacher:** Fauoro Olsen

2. **Class taught:** Class 2

3. **Number of children in class:** 14 boys, 15 girls

4. **Methods:** In every subject, new work is taught to the whole class, then they split up into three groups to do different activities, revising work already taught or newly taught work. In number work, Monday is the day in which new work is introduced. It’s mostly oral and practical work. Then written work comes in the other days. Those who finish before time can go on with harder sums printed on cards.

   The method used in teaching English Reading—the new word is used in many sentences. With words like run, jump, hop, etc., dramatise meanings. If nouns, like box, door, mat, etc., real objects are shown. The word is printed on the blackboard several times for children to see and say it. Then, they go to their seats and copy it four times, saying it at the same time. After writing it down, they go to group corners to do activities set out for them, like word matching, sentence matching, flash cards, etc. Group leaders are in charge. One group will stay with me at the blackboard. After each child in the group has read two lines from the passage, I’ll leave them to the group leader, but go and check the other two groups. After that they change to the next activity. When all the groups have had a turn in reading the passage, apparatus are put away and the children come down to the floor. I will read the passage over to them or sometimes get the best reader to do so.

   If the reading matter is suitable for dramatisation, then the children can dramatise it. If not, then I ask them questions about it. Sometimes I get a few children to tell it in a story form in Rotuman. The rest can add on to it or say it’s not true, like what the person telling it said.

   My class is divided into three groups: (A) best ones, (B) fair ones, (C) duller ones. Leaders are the best ones out of each group. If one of the leaders misbehaves or does not do his or her work properly, he or she is replaced by the next one. Those in the upper groups are expected to do better than the lower ones. If not, then they’ll go down, which will be a
disgrace to them. The ones in the lower groups try to get in the upper groups.

5. **Rewards:** In written work, the best ones are shown to the class. In hand work, the best ones are kept. In other things, a few words of praise are given or hand clapping, e.g., for those who are improving.

6. **Punishment:** The stick is given to those who swear, steal, lie, or fight. Those who did not have pencils, books or things needed for handwork more than two days will kneel on the floor, and also those who play during group or class work. Badly written work will be written again. If it’s still the same, then those who have done well will pull their ears. Careless or lazy writers are required to rewrite their work. If it is badly done again, then the stick is given to their hands, that is, if work can be better than what has been done.

7. **Aims:**
   (a) To make children realise that they are lucky to have what their parents missed, and it’s up to them to try to do better, while they have the chance to do so.
   (b) To teach them the need to be able to cope with everyday life problems, e.g., buying things from the shops, telling the time, etc.
   (c) Through stories of important or good people, to encourage them to want to do something useful in their future life.
   (d) To prepare them for upper class work.

As a teacher I would like all my children to be good and useful people to their people, community or wherever they go. The reasons why I chose teaching are:
   (a) I love children
   (b) I want to be useful to my people and country, by bringing up or helping children to become good citizens in their communities.

1. **Teacher:** Mosio M. Penjueli

2. **Class taught:** Class 4

3. **Number of children in class:** 14 boys, 16 girls
4. **Methods:** Split into 6 groups of 5 children. They compete with each other in all subjects. A test is given to select the best six as leaders. The weaker ones are in group 5 & 6 which I put very close to me, as they need my help more than the others.

5. **Rewards:** I use words of praising to reward them for good work.

6. **Punishment:** I often punish them for bad, dirty, etc. work by using words that I believe will make them feel ashamed of what they have done.

7. **Aims:** To gain children’s minds to learn & know whatever I teach them in all subjects. I expect them to become true respectful etc. in their future. I chose to be a teacher to help the children to grow up to know ways etc. to increase their knowledge, and to help my people known as the community anytime possible.

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1. **Teacher:** Anamarie K. Aisea

2. **Class taught:** Class 5

3. **Number of children in class:** 16 boys, 18 girls

4. **Methods:** The children are divided into 4 groups, dividing the girls and boys as equally as possible. This group method is used for Reading, Art and Revision work. The bright children are grouped together and the dull ones in one group for the teacher to pay attention to them especially. For most of the other subjects the class is taken as a whole. Revision of the previous work is taken before the new work, and revisional questions at the end. For Teaching Aids I collect as many visual aids as I possibly can and for the unobtainable ones I use quick sketches. The real objects, of course, if they can be obtained. In Natural Science, most of our work is done outside demonstrating the practical side of the topics and then the written work or visa-versa.

5. **Rewards:**
   a. A word of praise
   b. A clap from the class
   c. Work put up on the wall
   d. A chart on the wall recording the marks
e. Climbing a ladder. The best one on top, etc.

6. **Punishment:**
   a. For bad work—do the work again correctly and get the stick on their bottoms.
   b. Failing duty—The period of doing that particular duty is lengthened.
   c. Bad behaviour—corporal punishment.
   d. Disrespectful—a scolding and if serious the stick on their bottoms.

7. **Aims:** To be able to teach the children in a way for them to understand and to be able to prove to be citizens in the community in which they live. I became a teacher to be able to help my fellow countrymen and to share with them what little knowledge I have. Secondly, my love of children.

1. **Teacher:** Ieli Irava
   (Note: Ieli was Headmaster of Motusa School at the time)

2. **Class taught:** Composite class—Classes 5 & 6

3. **Number of children in class:** Class 5: 15 boys, 13 girls; Class 6: 13 boys, 13 girls

4. **Methods:** The method of teaching a big composite class varies a great deal in the various subjects. There is a certain amount of grouping, especially in Arithmetic, English, Reading (ability groups), etc. In Social Studies, Health, Natural Science, etc. grouping is done only when doing project work or for competitive work in questioning and answers.

   It is the official policy of the school is to let the students learn for themselves, rather than merely imparting information to them. On the other hand, this is sometimes quite impracticable because of the language problem. Therefore, the general procedure is to instruct the children firstly and then to encourage them to do work on their own. Individual recitation is used to ascertain the degree of learning and the class is also divided into groups for the purpose of stimulating competition. One person from one group will ask a question to a person in the other group, alternating back and forth between answering and asking questions; questions must be answered by individuals in rotation. The group with the most points at the end of the session wins the competition. Each group has a leader, but
leaders are rotated so that every child has a chance to be a leader at some time.

In addition to these groupings, the class is also divided into three groups on the basis of ability. The best group is given more difficult assignments to do (e.g., in an arithmetic quiz, the first group may be given 10 problems, the second 7 and the third 5). There is no official recognition of the ranking of these groups, but the students are well aware of the hierarchy and are proud to be in the advanced group, although the advanced students do not show their pride openly to the less advanced students.

5. Rewards: Rewards for good work is not given as something material. Rewarding of this sort will only encourage the children to expect something material. Any failure to comply with this kind of rewarding will only result in disappointment. A little praise and demonstrating of outstanding work gets far better results and encouragement, for the other children to try to achieve the same results.

6. Punishment: Punishment is given for (a) any form of bad behaviour and (b) for carelessness in school work. The form of punishment usually administered for bad work depends on the nature of the offense—laziness, untidiness, carelessness, etc. For such, scolding, repetition of the work, detaining of defaulter during recess, etc., is the more usual punishment and is given by the class teacher.

There is a regulation prohibiting the use of corporal punishment by teachers, and that this should be done only by permission of the headmaster, but in fact I authorize my teachers to use corporal punishment when they find it necessary. In extreme instances the case is referred to me and I administer the punishment. Scolding is used as a basic technique of control as well.

Examinations are given during the years (2 or 3 exams) and students are given grades and reports are sent to the parents. At the end of the year each teacher makes out a report on his children and the reports are evaluated by me, along with consideration of each child’s performance on the examinations, and the child’s age. I decide on the basis of these items whether or not they are to be passed on to the next grade. Age is a very important consideration in advancing the slower students and I tend to push them along if they are too old for the class they have been in, even if their performance doesn’t otherwise warrant such advance.

7. Aims: As a teacher I aim at these achievements:
(1) To raise the standard of education in Rotuma, and by doing so to raise the people’s standard of living—that is, to improve their health standards and make them more able to live in the modern world.
(2) To improve the moral and physical well-being of the people through the children.
(3) To try and develop any promising individuals in the various academic subjects and form the early basic requirements for higher education.
(4) To achieve the above is to prepare the children to be able to face the world better when they leave school and take up their responsibilities in their community. The reason why I chose to become a teacher is to try and achieve the above aims and, to me, teaching the children is the way in which I can do it best. I wouldn’t be helping them if I just took a job in Fiji.

1. Teacher: Faga K. Solomon

2. Class taught: Class 6

3. Number of children in class: 15 boys, 11 girls

4. Methods: These are the methods I use when I teach the following subjects:
   (a) Health:
      (1) By formal lessons.
      (2) Talks by children on Health topics
      (3) Personal examples
      (4) Incidental remarks as opportunity offers
   (b) Music:
      (1) Singing
      (2) Formal training
      (3) Musical appreciation
   (c) Natural Science
      (1) By formal lessons (Experiments, Discussions)
      (2) By group work (Observation, Reports, etc.)
      (3) By projects and assignments
      (4) By incidental teaching
      (5) Morning talks
Rotuman Life Experiences, 1890–1960

(d) Social Studies
   (1) By direct formal lessons, followed by notes written by children or teacher
   (2) Talks by children
   (3) In groups
   (4) By wall charts

(c) Arithmetic
   (1) Class is broken up into ability groups: A & B

(f) English
   (1) Oral works precedes all written work.
   (2) By the integration of formal English with all other aspects of the language, developing ideas which present themselves in reading or spelling period, e.g., noting the relationship of singular and plural.
   (3) By relating the formal work with everyday speech, and correcting mistakes as they arise in oral and written work.
   (4) Teaching grammar rules apart from oral and written work.
   (5) Children are given unlimited expression in spoken English. Verb drills, using all parts of verbs in sentences, sentence building and blackboard patterns.

5. **Rewards:** Good children are rewarded in the following way:
   (1) Either thanked by the teacher or one of the pupils.
   (2) Promoted to a higher group from where he or she was.
   (3) Chosen to be a leader of a group.

6. **Punishments:** Punishments are sometimes inflicted for:
   (1) Dishonesty
   (2) Disrespectfulness
   (3) Theft
   (4) Laziness
   (5) Disobedience

7. **Aims:** As a teacher who whole-heartedly loves my work, I earnestly hope to do my work to the best of my ability to be successful in every field and aspects of my teaching career.
1. **Teacher:** Elizabeth Inia

2. **Class taught:** Class 7A

3. **Number of children in class:** 16 boys, 19 girls

4. **Methods:**
   a. First important thing for me to remember before I teach any subject is to ask myself why I teach it. Unless I know the general aim, the children may obtain very little real value from my work.
   b. If I have a clear aim in my mind then I can try my best to achieve my aim in trying to help the children.
   c. In setting out a lesson I put in Step 1 what I expect to do first, Step 2 what I expect to do next and so on.
   d. In lessons such as History, Geography, N[atural] Science, and Hygiene, I usually arrange my work in at least three steps, that is:

      **Step 1.** Few questions at the beginning of the lesson to prepare the children’s minds for the new subject. It is impossible for them to learn anything completely new. They learn by linking a new idea to an old one.

      **Step 2.** After refreshing in the children’s minds some familiar ideas on which they connect the new ones, then the new ideas are presented to them. In this step, I find out that if I tell them everything, they are likely to forget what I say on the following week, and that is of very little value in developing the powers of the children. Telling method is good for lower classes, but in my class the Finding Out method is the best. Of course I must tell them something which is too hard for them to find out, if my questions fail to lead them to the facts. In this Presentation Step, Questions help them to reason out some facts. Demonstration is important. Teaching Aids help to make my teaching more effective. I have only a few pictures cut from some magazines; brown paper maps which I made myself because our school can’t afford to buy maps for each class; no globe either, drawings and sketches on the blackboard are very helpful indeed.

      **Step 3.** Lastly the children do something with the ideas presented to them. “No impression without expression.” The children answer
oral revision questions. They may draw something for the lesson or retell the story; they may draw maps or diagrams, etc.

e. In Reading Lesson, the modern method is to group the class according to attainment. The teacher trains leaders of the groups and sees that they know what they are supposed to do. He then moves from one group to the other, concentrating mostly on the weakest group. Sometimes he gives a model reading lesson in the beginning before the class goes to their different groups.

f. In my class, I teach them to help in sharing the responsibilities of keeping our class running smoothly. Monitors are chosen for cleaning blackboards, looking after windows, flower plots, etc.

g. My children are very keen in team organizations or “houses.”

Some general principles to follow:
- Base your teaching on the child and follow nature.
- Teach through the senses.
- Proceed from the concrete to the abstract.
- Proceed from the known to the unknown.
- Proceed from the simple to the complex.
- Teach inductively.
- Let the children observe, reason and memorise if worth memorising.
- Don’t tell them what they can readily find out for themselves.
- Let the children learn by doing.
- Make all your lessons interesting and attractive.

5 & 6. **Rewards and Punishment:** In order to ensure orderly behaviour in my class and to give them self-control and living in happy relations with each other here in the school-room as well as in their villages when they grow up, I must maintain good discipline.

1. **Teacher:** Avaiki Konousi

2. **Class taught:** Class 7B

3. **Number of children in class:** 23 boys, 14 girls

4. **Methods:** This class is divided up into five different groups of mixed sexes according to their abilities and knowledge. There are seven to a
group. The leaders in each group are selected every fortnight which gives everyone a chance in the training to be good organizers for the future as some of them are likely to leave this class at the age of 14 and it will give him or her every possibility of organizing his or her fellow mates in their various fields which they will likely possess in their community. These groups compete with each other in every subject taught. In teaching certain subjects like Arithmetic, English, Health, History, etc., I have a fixed method of introducing each of them. Before I present any of the above, I always remember that I should arouse the interest of my pupils in order to achieve the aims of my lesson. This is taught in many ways which I would like to point out.

In all my presentations, particularly a new topic, I always apply the teaching techniques that I gained from a couple of years training with slight alterations, i.e., I always introduce my lessons along these few points:

a. Teach from the simple to the difficult. This is the only way which I have known and gained from experience that it can arouse the interests of the pupils and maintain them right through the lessons. From being simple at first, I notice that they are anxious to learn and as the lesson progresses and links up to difficulty, they apply their initiative power and imagination frequently.

b. Teach from known to unknown.

c. Teach from concrete to abstract. In the course of my lesson, I try my very best to ask questions on the facts mentioned so that the pupils will remember them. I also find out that by framing my questions and asking them in the right time enables them to discover the facts for themselves and avoid myself from doing the talk instead and always in mind not to lecture to them so long to cause boredom. There are other methods besides these mentioned ones.

5. **Rewards:** In rewarding my children for good work, I often do it in these different ways:

a. Praise: As children a word of praise to them is very highly valued. They like being praised by others and by praising them inside the classroom, they give their finest effort to please the teachers and also sometimes they are able to win the favour of the teachers concerned and it encourages them to ask questions whatever the case may be.

b. Display: Pupils like to show to the public that they create things, so any good thing that is done by them I often display inside the classroom so that everyone will attempt their best to have one on the wall. A “roll of
honour” on the wall showing their marks on any lesson tested also gives them great competition daily at a very high standard.
c. Changing Seats: I have special seats in my class known to them as “Excellent seats” which only the excellent pupils occupy. Everyone tries their best to occupy one of these seats. These types of rewards raise the standard to a high level of success although I am using them to motivate the weaker group.

6. **Punishment**: Regarding this professional regulation concerning punishment, no teacher is permitted to give physical punishment to the pupils except the Headteacher. But the teachers always quote, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Rotuman children are different from Europeans; Rotuman children cannot learn without the aid of the rod. Once we stop using the rod, our children will turn out to become lazy and will never learn. By our giving punishment, children avoid misbehaviour and endeavour to learn. Although I punish my pupils at times, I always see that I don’t give corporal punishment so as to inflict injuries. All minor misbehaviours I punish with my pointer as they never show me any sign of misbehaviour or laziness. All serious offenses such as stealing, fighting, etc., I always forward to the Headmaster for consideration. Sometimes I growl at them instead of punishment. When I am about to give punishment, I always think for a while whether it is fair for me to give punishment or not.

7. **Aims**: Teaching from my point of view is a profession, and membership in a profession carries with it obligations as well as privileges. Although there are many Rotumans who possess very high posts, if you think back to their beginnings, I say the first entrance to their present employment is through their teachers. So being a teacher I am very proud, because teachers are the very people who are going to mould life in the future for the present generation to improve on the past. Actually there are many teachers in the colony of different races, but they only have experience with their own people. Therefore, a Rotuman teacher will do better than teachers of other races in educating our children. My most important aim in teaching is to help my countrymen so that one day they can overtake other races in the field of education. So in the future I will be very proud indeed to see the fruits of my teaching ripening all over the island.
1. **Teacher:** Father Beattie [From an interview]

2. **Classes taught:** Forms III and IV

3. **Number of children in class:** 7 boys

4. **Methods:** Mainly by personal instruction, with individual assignments given. A minimal amount of group work is also given.

5. **Rewards:** Tests are given at the end of each term and term reports are sent to the parents of the boys, with an inclusion of a class average. On individual assignments grades are used and also the informal use of verbal rewards and criticisms is made.

6. **Punishment:** Regarding disobedient behaviour, the Bishop has ordered that no European teachers are to use the stick. Instead I use verbal admonishments and if they don’t refrain, they are told to “roll up their mats.” Since I have been at Upu I have told two boys to leave because of disobedient behaviour. If I were allowed to use the stick I would do so. The Bishop’s orders were, however, that if a child needs to be hit, you must have a native do it. This I have never done.

7. **Aims:** My primary aim is to turn out good men—to give them a chance to better themselves. The examinations [Fiji juniors] force me into a competitive situation, since the school is judged on the outside by the test performances of its students, not the results of its moral training. In my opinion that is not a primary goal. The important thing is to try to get them to have a love of the good and the true. Hang if they pass exams or not, if a fellow comes out of here and can think for himself and isn’t swayed by others, if he has a love of the good and the true, I don’t care if he goes out and plants tapioca.

   The Bishop’s goal is to develop a local clergy, but I don’t think of that as a primary goal; it’s more of a long-range goal. It’s kind of a difficult thing. You can’t put ideas into kids’ heads … besides, here they are too young.

   Perhaps I don’t instil strong motivation into my children because I am not competitive myself. I also think it’s useless for people to be educated to a point where they can no longer live happily in their own culture and there is no place for them in the society.
1. **Teacher:** Aisea Aitu

2. **Class taught:** Form III

3. **Number of children in class:** 9 girls, 6 boys. Average age in July 1960 is 15 years

4. **Methods:**
   (i) The class is taught as one group of 15 pupils. Each child is allowed a considerable measure of freedom as regards to his or her rate of progress.
   (ii) Marks for each test in each subject are kept and this gives the teacher a fair idea of each pupil’s ability.
   (iii) Because of the extreme shortage of reading matter such as newspapers, magazines, etc., and the fact the radio set has not found its way to the average Rotuman home, many subjects such as social studies have to be taught using the direct method of really teaching or telling them what has to be taught. At times one or two children may have heard about the subject but otherwise the teacher has to do his or her best to convey a mental picture either by descriptions or diagrams or both. The teacher is very fortunate if what he or she is teaching has its picture available. I am thinking particularly of geography when one has to teach, say, the various types of forests, e.g., Boreal, Jungle, Tropical and Monsoon forests. Pictures of these will obviously be the best that we in Rotuma can hope for, for without these, descriptions and diagrams and characteristics will, at best, only convey to the children a distorted picture of, say, what a monsoon forest really is.

   For general truths in maths, especially in geometry, I usually introduce these by posing a problem or problems and asking pupils to find their own methods of solving them. This is an occasion in which the bright pupils will generally submit a reasonable solution though some of these may be wrong. After these “researches,” I would then teach them the accepted truths or theorem or formula sometimes using some of the children’s own findings and observations. This is followed by mechanical problems and pure problems which might also involve truths already taught.

   In teaching English, my greatest difficulty—in fact the greatest difficulty in a non-English-speaking country—is to encourage the children to think in English as they speak it. This is a real problem as the need to speak English in Rotuma is almost negligible. Children can do very well without English in the home and, consequently, they have to make a conscious effort to think in English while they are speaking it. To
counteract this, I ask the children to write the following for me to mark: 1 composition, 1 letter, 1 geography composition, 1 comprehension test. These four constitute what I call a MUST in English in the week’s work. Incidental and other work consist of talks given by pupils, reading of poetry and prose, debates and grammar work and exercises.

As far as formal grammar is concerned, the Department of Education lays down no definite ruling as to how the subject should be taught except that the teaching of this subject should be planned in such a way that it does not become a meaningless and unnecessary task. The idea behind this is that no formal grammar should be taught until the NEED arises. In Rotuma, however, I believe that the pupils will need to have a firm grasp of the rudimentary mechanics of English because they do not live in an environment full of rich and correctly spoken English. “Learn to speak by speaking” is quite all right if one speaks and hears correct English and speaks it frequently enough, but as this is impossible in Rotuma, Rotuman pupils should not depend entirely on this method to enhance their knowledge of English. In this connexion, I can say that perhaps I teach a bit more grammar than is required by the department but I feel that I am justified in doing so because my experience both as a pupil and a teacher in Rotuma led me to believe that the “learn to speak by speaking” method is inadequate in Rotuma and that a good background of English grammar is necessary to implement the teaching of English.

In my correction of pupils’ work in English, I simply use a system whereby a symbol is put in the margin where a mistake occurs on the same line. The wrong word or words are crossed out. The pupil is expected to correct and rewrite the corrected version of phrase or sentence and show it again to me. This procedure applies to all written work in English, whether it be English composition or a geography essay.

5. **Rewards:** With me, these are rare. Perhaps the only form of rewards that I frequently use is that written at the end of an exercise which I mark in their books. The following are used: “Good” or “Very Good Work—keep it up.” This last one is of course rarely given. Other semi-reward, half-threat phrases & clauses that I used are “This is not your best”; “Writing poor—look out!” and many others. Perhaps the greatest reward that my pupils can hope for is to have one’s work read to the class. I believe there have been only two such readings so far this year.

6. **Punishment:** I punish pupils for the following reasons: (1) Bullying, (2) fighting, (3) using obscene language, (4) disrespectful behaviour, (5) stealing, (6) late to work, (7) failing to bring knife for work,
(8) not standing to attention while the flag is being lowered, (9) talking during parade, (10) failure to pick up rubbish in the morning, (11) breaking a school rule, (12) telling lies, (13) failing a duty, e.g., sweeping, (14) copying other children’s work, (15) not doing homework, (16) inattention in class or parade, (17) carelessness in written work, e.g., a child may repeatedly make a mistake in spelling a word which has been corrected many times before.

The following two participants taught practical subjects. Iliese Atalifo taught woodworking classes for boys and Jiuria Samuel taught sewing and cooking for girls.

1. **Teacher:** Iliese Atalifo

2. **Classes taught:** Classes 6 to 8 in the primary section and Form III to IV in the secondary section

3. **Number of children in classes:** 133 boys in the following woodwork classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class 6</th>
<th>Class 7B</th>
<th>Class 7A</th>
<th>Class 8</th>
<th>Form III</th>
<th>Form IV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motusa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paptea</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>133</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Methods:**

(a) Grouping methods: The groups are formed according to each different type of work or project they are doing. For example, the boys in a class might be doing three different types of work, which means this class will be grouped into three.

(b) Teaching methods: The methods used to every group fall under the following subheadings:
1. Preparation: At this stage I explain what is to be done. Tell each user or show what new process previously unknown to the children that must be used. Note: Preparation must be short and interesting, and should really prepare the children for what is to follow. It is not a lecture; it should not be a waste of time with too much talk. Its main aim is to link new things to be taught with what the pupils have already learnt (from known to unknown).

2. Demonstration: The teacher who is demonstrating should clearly explain each step in the work he is doing.

3. Summing Up: After the demonstration, the teacher should go over the main points again by questioning & answering so that each pupil has a clear idea of what he is going to do and how to do it.

4. Application: This must be done by the pupils who must now apply what they have seen and been told. At this stage the teacher must encourage pupils to ask questions.

Important Rules: Never do the work for your pupil, make him do it himself. If he is doing the wrong method or wrong work, stop him and get a new piece of scrap wood in which to demonstrate to him what he should do, then make him do the process before going back to the exercise in hand.

5. Rewards: I do give a few words of praise and a passing mark in his Record Card.

6. Punishment: For bad behaviours, fighting amongst themselves, disrespectful acts, punishments are usually warnings and sticks. For poor work, the punishment is to repeat the work.

7. Aims: My only hope as a teacher is to enable my children to become good citizens in future. I chose to become a teacher for the following reasons:
   1. I love the teaching part.
   2. To be a helpful figure not only in schools but to outsiders as well.
   3. To know a bit of everything as a teacher should.
   4. This is one way in which I can earn my bread and butter.
1. **Teacher:** Jiurie M. Samuela

2. **Classes taught:** I am teaching girls of different schools starting from Class 6 to Form IV. Each class has a turn for sewing or cooking just for 1-1/2 hours in a week.

3. **Number of children in classes:** Here are the number of girls in each class from each school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motusa</td>
<td>Class 6</td>
<td>13 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paptea</td>
<td>Class 6</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumi</td>
<td>Class 6</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>Class 6</td>
<td>11 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>Class 7b</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>Class 7a</td>
<td>19 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumi</td>
<td>Class 7</td>
<td>5 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumi</td>
<td>Class 8</td>
<td>5 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>Class 9</td>
<td>22 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>Form III</td>
<td>9 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>Form IV</td>
<td>9 girls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Methods:** Let’s take sewing as an example to describe my methods of teaching technical work.

   Blackboard preparation has been written beforehand and the class comes in at 9:00 o’clock for their 1-1/2 hour period. Names are called and revision work taken for about 5 minutes. Then I read out the notes on the blackboard & an 1/2 hour theory given before children start doing practical work. As each process is shown in practical work the theory in connection with it is given.

   After the half-hour period, children take out their sewing and work in groups according to the number of machines they have to use, e.g., if a class has twelve girls they are divided into three different groups; if more than twelve, then into four or more groups, so that four or six girls could use one machine.

   As some of the girls have already been able to use the machines properly, they are distributed among the groups as a captains of each team.
and set as a goal that all members of the team be able to use the machine. To avoid wasting time while waiting for machines the girls do some hand-sewing to carry on with, as well as machine garments. Children who have no sewing are provided with a sewing job for the school, mending sports jerseys, curtains, etc., or helping their friends who are far behind with their sewing.

The class as a whole is called to the demonstration table to introduce or demonstrate something new, e.g., cutting out a garment. I do the cutting on actual material, then the children practice on paper before the real project. Those who learn quickly are likely to finish early and may become group leaders for the next project, supposing that the work is a big one. The children are allowed to keep their own sewing and to do some sewing between our sewing lesson and the next lesson, provided that a satisfactory standard and correct method are being used.

The group leaders report any trouble or bad equipment and I go around assisting girls who are in need. The children stop work at ten or eight minutes before time for their cleaning up.

5. **Rewards:** Words of praise are given to those who work well and keep their work tidy.

6. **Punishment:** Minor punishments are given for bad behaviour, fighting among themselves, disrespectful acts, etc. Punishments like carrying so many baskets of soil, digging, scrubbing, etc. Corporal punishment is given but not very often.

7. **Aims:** As a teacher I expect my pupils to be good ladies, i.e., housewives helping in their own villages, looking after their homes in a hygienic way. Being a teacher is my only choice to help my country.
Chapter 15
Adolescence, Courtship, and Paths to Marriage

During the first half of the twentieth century, a few Rotumans continued their education in Fiji and abroad after completing schooling in Rotuma (most frequently to become teachers or nurses), and some others migrated to Fiji where they took employment or became sailors on merchant ships. But the majority of youngsters stayed at home and learned to perform adult tasks. Boys became adept in horticulture and fishing, in building houses and making canoes, and in preparing food for native feasts. Girls learned to weave mats, to care for a household, to fish, and to prepare everyday meals.

In the life stories collected in 1960 from Rotuman men and women of all ages, a common refrain was leaving school to help their parents and contribute to the support of their families. Here are some examples:

*Man in his 50s:* We grew older and I was forced to stay at home [from school] and help my father work. I began to work very hard and my mother seemed to become happier, compared to the time when I was small. I found out that we were poor because of our father’s laziness. When my younger brother left school and helped us work our family began to live more happily, like others did.

*Man in his 40s:* I left school and began to help my father and elder brother in their plantations. They liked me because I worked very well and helped them a lot.

*Man in his 30s:* I . . . had to leave school [when] I was in Class 6. I still wanted to study but there wasn’t anybody to pay my school fees. Life was becoming harder for me because I knew I had to work and look after my mother and grandfather. I had to cut copra to earn money for us and sometimes became so tired that I went to
sleep without supper. By the time I was 17 I got used to our native kind of work.

*Man in his 30s:* When I was 14 years old I told my father that I didn’t want to go to school and asked him if I could stay home. I told him that I wasn’t really learning anything in school and that he was just wasting his money by sending me, and that it would be better if I could stay home and help him with his plantations. Dad agreed that I could stop going to school if I wanted, so I stayed home and helped him.

*Man in his 20s:* Sometimes, when my father was sick, I had to stay home from school and get food for the family. Finally I left school so that I could help my father work on his plantations. I knew that if he would work too hard by himself he might get sick and die, and there would be no one to look after my small sisters as well as their father did.

*Woman in her 50s:* I came out from school when I was 14 years old and I stayed with my brothers and sisters at home. Most of the time I spent at home helping my mother.

*Woman in her 40s:* When I grew older I became wiser and my mother could trust me to do her work and to help her however I could.

*Woman in her 30s:* I felt bad to see my mother working so hard so I stopped going to school in order to stay home and help her.

*Woman in her 30s:* I came out from school when I was 14 years old…. I stayed home and helped my mother, and she taught me how to fish and how to make mats.

*Woman in her 20s:* [After] I left school, … I stayed home to help my mother and to help my father in his plantations and look after the animals…. I knew that once my parents died I couldn’t have them again, and as the years passed away, the weaker they became.

In addition to the work they performed for their families, groups of boys and girls formed the nucleus of communal labour in every village. On
ceremonial occasions when a village or district hosted visitors, the young men prepared most of the food, while the young women did most of the serving and cleaning up. And although not mentioned in the life histories, groups of boys and girls also participated in a variety of sporting activities, the boys in cricket, rugby, soccer, and such traditional sports as wrestling (*hula*) and spear throwing (*tīkā*), and the girls in netball and field hockey.

**Courtship**

The primary focus of the reminiscences about adolescence for both men and women was courtship and the quest for a suitable spouse. The boys in a village would form a group and in the evenings would roam to other villages in the hope of meeting agreeable females. Much of the socialization of boys and girls by the parental generation was aimed at inculcating the kinds of qualities that would make them desirable mates. For boys this meant, first and foremost, becoming a good provider. For girls it meant that, in addition to learning to perform all the chores associated with the role of housewife, she should develop a manner of decorum marked by modesty with a touch of shyness, consideration for others including in-laws, and a sense of humour. However, there was a tension between parents and their adolescent offspring insofar as arranged marriages were the cultural ideal and were negotiated between families, while boys and girls were prone to form alliances based on emotional attachments. This often resulted in a conflict of interest that showed up over and over again in the life histories, with parents frequently disapproving of the initial marital choices of their children, with varying outcomes.

The degree with which Rotumans focused on courtship as a matter of concern during the time period we are concerned with is testified to by
the number of sayings bearing on the courting process collected by
Elizabeth Inia and published in Fäeag 'es Fūaga. I have selected the few
below that I think best reflect cultural attitudes regarding courtship at the
time.

Recognition of the preoccupation of young men and women with
courtship is revealed in the saying ‘Af’af se ‘es vai (An illness that cannot be
cured), which refers to a “lovesick” individual. More specific to males is
Ha‘ rau (Smoking leaves), which was said of men who went visiting at
night, searching for places to court women. Smoking was once a new thing
on Rotuma, with the allure of the foreign. Young men smoked cigarettes
to show off and attract girls, especially during maneа‘ hune‘ele (beach games).
The phrase became a metonym for young men intent on courtship.

Expectations regarding gender roles in courtship were reflected in
two sayings: Sus ‘en fa (Milk of men) reflected the double standard for
unmarried men and women. Milk is a metaphor for indulgence, including
sexual indulgence. Young men were expected to go around looking for a
suitable mate and trying out different relationships, while girls were
expected to remain chaste. Another saying, Hanua ‘uhlei (A village of sweet
yams), referred to a tendency for intermarriage between boys and girls
from the same village. As Mrs. Inia noted, “It is difficult to dig up the
edible root of the ‘uhlei because the vine of the plant is full of thorns. These
thorns are likened to young men who keep possible suitors from elsewhere
away from the girls (sweet yams) of their village.” Although it was
considered preferable to marry someone from another village, some
youths were so zealous in guarding the virtue of the women of their village
that they prevented others from courting them.

The clandestine nature of courtship relations was captured in the
saying ‘Otou pan heta (My pen pal), which was said of a friend of the
opposite sex, a lover. The saying refers to the custom of passing notes, usually through a trusted friend, to someone one was interested in romantically. This was a way of surreptitiously initiating a relationship so that others, particularly parents, did not find out about it which could expose the lovers to shameful ridicule and censure.

Several sayings embody criticism of unmarried men and women who were fickle and had difficulty in forming stable relationships. The expression *Moa te Sumi* (The cock at Sumi) refers to the weather vane in the form of a rooster atop the Catholic church in Juju. Whichever way the wind blows, the cock turns in that direction. People who frequently change their minds are like that rooster. Likewise, the commentary *‘Oaf öföf* (Unstable love) is a criticism of someone who forms a relationship for a little while, then drops it; the saying was especially used in reference to a man who could not stay with one woman.

Then there were the words of advice to young men and women engaged in courtship that were in the form of sayings. For instance, *Faksar ‘e mal la’la’o, sirien se hanua ‘oroi* (Enticed by moving pictures [illusions], he passes on to the afterworld) was a warning against temptations that promise more than they deliver. It was especially a warning to boys who were tempted to pursue girls whose affections could not be trusted. In a similar vein, *Fan’ia hual ta* (To shoot the moon) was a warning to a boy who wanted to marry a rich, pretty, or otherwise unattainable girl. His hopes were thought to be set too high. That one should avoid being enticed by good looks alone is the premise of the saying *‘Eagke ‘a laboág mafa [‘a lag mafa]* (It is not that [you are going] to eat [her] eyes). The implication is that one should look for a capable person who can reliably look after you and your family. You should not be satisfied by good looks alone. Most important, perhaps, was the admonition *‘Ofa; la re; ma a’sahsahag* (Love, but
not beyond the stripes). This was said to someone who was so much in love that they did not know how to control themselves. It was a way of cautioning an unmarried young man who was so much in love he spent all his time and resources on a girl before they were married. His parents would advise him to “put on the brakes” and not “cross over the stripes [stop lines]” in case she would end up rejecting him. The saying alludes to traffic markers on paved roads in Fiji and abroad (there being no paved roads or traffic markers on Rotuma). Finally, the saying Mus Rotuam heta nono ma ‘e mua heta (Whispering in Rotuman is always the best) warns against marrying someone from another country, a foreigner. According to Mrs. Inia:

This saying is less a rejection of inter-ethnic marriage than a way of drawing attention to the importance of conjugal communication. The implication is that, for a woman especially, bedtime provides the best opportunity for talking over problems as well as whispering endearments. It is also the time that women are considered to be in the strongest negotiating position vis-a-vis their husbands. A wife can make the most of the opportunity only if she and her husband speak the same language.

Forms of Marriage

In its ideal form, arranged marriages (sok fāeag) were characterized by formal negotiations between the boy’s and girl’s families. Typically, the young man, or a member of his family that desired the match, initiated negotiations by sending a representative to the girl’s family to speak on his behalf. A suitor often sent his father, or an uncle, but to add weight to a proposal a man of rank—a sub-chief, or even a district chief—might be implored to make the overture. According to custom, a girl’s parents could make a decision without consulting her, and marriages could be arranged between parties who did not know each other. If the offer was accepted,
the two families would engage in a series of gift exchanges, culminating in an elaborate wedding ceremony. Although a marriage arranged by sok fēag often necessitated a large and expensive wedding, it had the advantage of universal sanction within the Rotuman community and a cooperative alliance between the families involved. Less formal, but nevertheless respectable marriages, could be arranged with the acceptance of the union by both the boy’s and girl’s families, even though the couple were known to be intimate beforehand. Here are some examples from the life histories:

*Man in his 60s:* I became an adolescent and mixed with other boys. We began to wander every night to villages near our district. I met an adolescent girl whom I seemed to love most but when my parents knew about it they gave me a good scolding because they didn’t like the girl, so I had to stay away from her. Then I met another one, but my parents didn’t like her just the same. Words that came from these two young girls’ relations made them very angry. I loved these two girls because when we met each other and I knew I was the one who spoke to them first. I thought that we could make up a good family, but my parents didn’t like them so I had to find a way to stay away from them.

One evening my parents told me that they had found a young woman and already spoke to her parents about her becoming my wife. They told me her name and I was so glad to hear about her because she was one of the girls who hated me to come near her whenever the young boys and girls mixed together. I loved her, of course, but never got a chance to get near her. We made our engagement and after a few months we got married. Everything was easy because of our parents.

*Man in his 50s:* At the end of 1926, after getting my teaching certificate, I came back to Rotuma and got married. I had seen my wife in 1923 on a visit to Rotuma after I finished primary school. But my father arranged the whole thing while I was in Fiji. He just told me to come to Rotuma and get married and take my wife back to Fiji with me. I didn’t mind, so I consented. What actually
happened is that while in Fiji I met a Rotuman nurse and wanted to marry her. She said if our parents agreed, she would agree, so I sent a letter to my father, but he told me no, that he would choose a wife for me, and he did.

**Woman in her 60s:** One day my parents told me that I was to get married to a young man who had come to them and asked them if he could marry with me. I didn’t want to dispute my father’s wishes because I was a bit frightened of him, so I gave my agreement. I wondered how my parents could do it—have me get married to a man whom I had never known before. I didn’t have any idea what kind of character he had. But I went through with it and we got married and he came to live with my parents.

**Woman in her 40s:** I made friends with a neighbouring girl about my age and we had good times. We knew each other very well and we always had the same mind when we wished to do something. It was then that I began to make friends with boys, but I was afraid that my grandparents might become very angry with me. One day I told my auntie and grandmother that I had a boyfriend and they didn’t like it and told me not to make any more boyfriends, so I didn’t. I stayed away from my friends for a few days and did not even go out in the evenings. Then one day my grandmother told me that I was going to get married. She knew that that man would take good care of me. I wondered what sort of a man my grandparents would give me to. All the days before I got married I thought of leaving my grandparents and running away to find a new home for myself, but my conscience told me to wait; maybe it was the right thing my people were doing to me. It was really right! We got married even though I didn’t know the man before and I was a bit frightened of him, but he was very kind to me.

**Woman in her 30s:** I made friends with my neighbours and we stayed together sometimes when we wished to go for picnics on Sundays and during holidays. We were together for a few months when one day my auntie told me that one boy had come to tell her that he wanted me to marry him. I was a bit annoyed, but she comforted me and said that she knew that that boy was nice and that he might love me. I agreed at last but I didn’t really know him.
Complications and Tensions with In-Laws

Parental opposition to unions formed by their offspring was commonplace and often resulted in breaking up relationships that had been formed:

*Man in his 50s:* When I was twelve, I fell in love with a girl and talked with her. I wanted to marry her, but my father didn’t like it. My father thought I was too young to marry, so he sent me to Fiji.

*Man in his 20s:* Soon after I came back I started to go out in the evenings with my friends. We went to the shows and dances together and always had a good time. Then one day I met a girl whom I liked and I wanted to make her my girlfriend. I started to go to see her almost every night. Then one day she told me that she was afraid to continue this way because the people might find out and tell her mother and father, and if that would happen and I wouldn’t marry her, she would be very ashamed, and maybe she wouldn’t be able to find another husband because of it. Because I had been holding her close to me in my arms nearly every night I felt like I would like to marry her. Besides, when I heard she was afraid I felt bad, because she was my girlfriend and I didn’t want anything to hurt her. A couple of days after that I went to her again and she told me that I better make up my mind if I wanted to marry her or not, so I went right to her mother and father and told them that I really loved their daughter and that I wanted to marry her. After I talked to them they said they would agree to it and let me marry their daughter. I came home that night with my heart full of happiness and love. I told my parents about it but they didn’t like it and didn’t want me to marry this girl. When the girl’s mother found out that my parents didn’t want me to marry her, she told me that she’d never let me marry her daughter.

One reason for parental opposition to a marriage was when the boy and girl were from different religions. At the time, there were only two religious denominations on the island, Methodist and Catholic; relations between them had soured as a result of a war in the late nineteenth century and had not yet been reconciled.³
Man in his 60s: At about age 14 my father left all his plantations to me. He stayed home and did as he wished, and I looked after our plantations. I went out every evening with my friends in the neighbourhood. We went from village to village seeking our own pleasure. I met a young woman who lived in another district and we started to see each other, but her parents and relatives objected because of our different religions.

Nevertheless, parents, or parental surrogates, sometimes accepted unions that had been formed without their knowledge rather than alienate their offspring, as per the following accounts:

Woman in her 60s: When I grew up and became an adolescent, I made friends with my neighbours, and whenever they wanted to go somewhere we always went together. That time all the adolescent girls were under the care of the chief’s sister. We had formed a club and practiced our native dances, and we went dancing around the island, competing with other clubs. My parents always told me to stay quiet when I joined the others to go any place. I met many people when we went dancing in different places and became familiar with the different ways of people, but both the old people and young people were as nice and polite as could be. They always gave us a warm welcome whenever we came to their places to dance.

It happened that I met an adolescent boy with whom I fell in love. He spoke to me, but I didn’t want to take a chance, and I just told him that my parents were at home. He seemed to have the same feeling for me as I did for him, so his father came to my parents one night and they spoke about us. My parents were surprised because I never told them about that boy. They asked me about it and I just gave them my agreement and they sent words of contentment to the boy’s parents, and after a few months we got married.

Woman in her 50s: On holidays I used to go out with my girl friends and look for fun. Sometimes we went out and met boys. We would talk to them and joke, just like we really knew them well. One day I met a boy and every time that I used to go out with my friends I used to talk and joke with him. I watched the way he acted and
began to like him very much. Deep in my heart I was in love with him, but I didn’t know whether he loved me or not, so I joked with him and always hid my love.

One night I went with my brothers to a dance and I met him. That night he was drunk, and when I danced with him he told me all about his love for me, so I told him that I loved him, too. I told him that I started to love him from the first day we met, and that if he really loved me he would come and tell my parents so we could get married. He came and talked to my parents and we got married soon afterwards. I was 16 years old at the time.

Woman in her 40s: My parents told me to leave school when I was 15 years of age…. I stayed home to help my mother…. I began to make friends with other adolescent girls in the village and played games at night with adolescent boys who would come from other villages. After a few months I met a boy who seemed to love me in return and I told my parents that they would like him if he spoke to them. He did come one day with his father, and not long afterwards our dreams came true; we got married and stayed in my home.

Defiance of parental opposition to marriages was not unusual, however, as the following stories indicate:

Man in his 60s: With some of the boys from the neighbourhood I used to go out in the evening and roam around the village. We went to the shows and dances and enjoyed ourselves. After that we would come home to sleep. It happened one day that I met a nice-looking woman whom I wanted to marry if my parents would agree to it. I knew that this woman had been married before, and that her husband had died. I tried different ways, but I couldn’t have a chance to speak to this woman, and then I told my parents about it, but because we were of different religions, my parents told me to look forward to the future and I might meet a young woman who was of the same religion as myself. But I felt that I had to marry this woman. She might be kinder to me than a younger one. I waited, but my parents wouldn’t change their mind, so I left them and went to this woman’s home.
Man in his 60s: My friends and I used to take evening strolls to other villages, looking for fun with the adolescent boys and girls of other places. It happened one time that I met a girl and we fell in love with each other, so I came home and told my parents. But because we were of different religions my parents did not want me to marry this girl. I was very stubborn and wanted my wish to come true, so I forced my parents to give their agreement. They did and we got married.

Man in his 50s: When I was about 15, I left school and stayed home to look after our family…. Being an adolescent boy, I began to make friends with other boys in the village and followed them everywhere they went every evening. A few years later I began to make girlfriends like the older boys. In the beginning I felt very shy to face my girlfriend when we happened to meet each other, but later I was said to be the worst boy ever towards the adolescent girls. I fell in love with many girls I met, but since my parents refused to accept them I had to leave them. At last I met a young woman whom I really loved, and before telling my parents I brought her home. We were married without my parents’ consent, but I didn’t face them or else we might have had a big quarrel.

One strategy for defying parental objections was for the boy to go to the girl’s home with the intention of staying, termed fu’u. This was sometimes accomplished, with the girl’s consent, by sleeping with her overnight and instead of leaving in the morning, remaining in her bed. This was considered equivalent to an announcement of his intention to marry the girl:

Man in his 30s: After being in the army for nearly two years I decided to return to Rotuma in time for the Christmas holidays. I came back home and saw my mother and father again, and we all spent a very happy Christmas together. Every night I used to go with my friends to the beach games, and one night I met a girl. I looked at her and loved her right away. I liked the way she talked and the way she acted, so every night during that Christmas holiday I went to be with her. One night she asked me whether I
really loved her or not, and I answered by telling her I loved her with all my heart and soul. After having been with her every night during the playtime (mane’a), my mind was made up and I didn’t care about anything else, only her. I thought of her every day and when I left her, I counted the hours and minutes until I would meet her again the next night. On the last night of the holiday season I listened to the way she talked to me and I knew that she really loved me. One night I went to her and we talked the whole night, and I slept there and the next day I stayed at her home, fu’re. Soon after that we were married.

Another scenario was for young women to defy parental objections by leaving home and going to stay with her boyfriend’s family. Such behaviour on a girl’s part is labelled taupiri in Rotuman and was regarded as a rather shameful way for a girl to form a conjugal union. It was a last resort for girls in love who were unable to persuade their parents to accept their choice:

*Man in his 30s:* In Suva I met a lovely girl whom I loved and many times I tried to speak to her, but I didn’t know how to talk to young girls. I finally got a chance one day and spoke to her. We began to know each other and at the end we were like a married couple. I really loved this girl and told her to wait so I could return home and tell my parents. I came home on the next boat and told my family about this and they all refused to accept it…. How sorry I was to leave this girl behind; I should have brought her with me. I gradually forgot her because we could see each other no more. Then I met another girl but my parents still didn’t want me to get married and refused to accept her as well. I still kept seeing her using false pretences, but later rumours went around and the girl found out that my parents had refused her, so she left for Fiji. I felt so sorry for her because I knew we loved each other and planned for our future together, and yet we had to part because of my parents….

Three years passed…. I met a third girl. I loved her and wondered if my parents would reject her as well. I knew that she loved me so we planned our future, but we guessed that my parents
wouldn’t like her because she was of a different religion. Anyway, I took her home and we got married in a few weeks’ time.

_Woman in her 30s:_ The neighbouring adolescent girls … came over and we spent the evenings together in my home, but sometimes we would go out for a stroll.

   One day I met a boy whom I seemed to love. We began to see each other and spoke about the future. This boy knew how to play music and this made me like him even more. I thought he was the only man in the world. I told my parents about him and that we wished to get married as soon as we possibly could, but my parents told me that I was still too young. My brothers and sisters had all gotten married and only myself was left and they wanted me to stay with them. That boy and I kept on seeing each other so one day I went with him to his home. My parents were very angry with me but I didn’t care. This boy promised to take good care of me so I was willing to leave my parents.

For young women who had been abroad in Fiji and returned to Rotuma, complications often arose that affected their attachments to both boyfriends and parents, as the following accounts illustrate:

_Woman in her 20s:_ I thought it would be a good idea to take a holiday because I had been studying very hard [in Fiji] and felt it would be good to have a rest before beginning to study again. So I left the secondary school and returned to Rotuma…. But I still liked school and intended to return after the holiday.

   When I got home my parents were very glad to see me and were very kind to me. The other people in Juju treated me well, too. I really spent a good Christmas holiday that year and had plenty of fun. Nearly every night I went _fara_ with the boys and girls. It was the first Christmas holiday I had ever spent in which I had such good fun. My mother and father let me go with the boys and girls every night. They didn’t mind because they trusted me. They said I had learned everything in school and should know how to protect myself from the sins of the world.

   Unluckily, I didn’t know how the Rotuman boys trick the girls, because I had been at school and didn’t have any boyfriends. So I didn’t know the ways of the Rotuman boys. One night during that
Christmas holiday I met a boy and he talked to me. He told me that he loved me from the first time he saw me. I believed him because from the first time we had met he always acted good to me and talked sweet. On that night he told me all about his feeling for me. I thought about the kindness he had shown to me and made up my mind to love him. I thought that he was telling the truth—that he really wanted to keep me—so I trusted him, but when he knew I was going to have a baby he left me.

When my parents and close relatives knew that I was going to have a baby they got very angry with me. At that time I didn’t know what to do and cried myself to sleep nearly every night. I said that it was my father’s fault, because he was the one who wanted me to come to Rotuma in the first place. My father really got angry with me and sent me to my mother’s brother’s house.

Woman, age unknown: I worked in the C. W. M. Hospital…. when I met a young man who was studying to be a doctor. We loved each other so dearly that we became engaged.

Thinking of myself, who really hated boys when I was in school, and then engaged to be married later on! At the end of that year I was told to leave for Rotuma to work for my people. I love it, of course, but hated to leave my fiancé, and felt very lonely and sad when the boat was sailing away from the wharf, where I could see the young man who stole my heart waving his hands to me.

When I reached Rotuma, I felt very glad to see my dear parents waiting for me with my brothers and sisters. I was kindly welcomed by all of my relations and my fiancé’s relations too.

I began to work in the hospital in Ahau and spent the weekends at home. After a year, two nurses were told to stay at their house to help the others in the villages because there was only one doctor on the island and he really needed more doctors or nurses. I was the second nurse, so I came home to look after two districts. After two years at home doing my favourite nursing, I learned that my fiancé had gone to New Zealand to complete his course. I became very impatient after three long years of waiting without hearing any more definite words from him.

By then I met another young man whom I seemed to love whenever he spoke to me. I told my parents about it and they refused to accept it, so I pretended to obey them. When we had made all our plans to settle down, we made known our wedding
day. My parents were really very angry with me but I wanted my dreams to come true.

Notes to Chapter 15


2 For detailed discussions of Rotuman marriage patterns and the ceremonies that pertain to them, see “Rotuman Marriage,” by Tiu Malo, in Rotuma: Hanua Pumue (Precious Land), by Ansemlo Fatiaki and others (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1991); and Kato‘aga: Rotuman Ceremonies, by Elizabeth K. Inia (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001).

Chapter 16

Marriage

Despite cultural constraints on public displays of affection, relationships between husbands and wives on Rotuma were generally close, both emotionally and practically. The gendered division of labour, described in chapter 18, required that both a mature male and mature female were needed for a household to function properly as a domestic unit. Normally these were husband and wife. Because women’s work was valued as much as men’s, and women could inherit land in their own right, wives had relatively high status, though publicly men were generally regarded as heads of their household. If a couple lived on the wife’s land, her status was correspondingly enhanced.

Rotuman sayings regarding relations between husbands and wives acknowledge the sometimes-dominant role women played in relation to their husbands. For example, the notion that “women are unbreakable ropes” (Haina lu vasu) refers to the influence that wives could exercise over their husband’s will. As Elizabeth Inia put it in Fäeag ‘es Fūaga, “Generally in Rotuma, whatever the wife wants, the husband will do, even if he is the chief.”

Also indicative of a wife’s power is a saying, based on a comment by the legendary warrior Muato’a, that the only place he felt fear was at the sleeping end of his house, where he had to face his wife. Although Muato’a had successfully fought in wars, he said he could not win when opposed by his wife. This saying was a common response by men to teasing about their wives’ dominating them. It implies that although a man can be courageous when confronting other men, he does not want to
offend his wife for fear that she will deny him sexually or otherwise cause him unhappiness.

The phrase *A'u'ua se niu roa* (To rest on a tall coconut tree) is a sympathetic comment about a man, who, after working in his garden all day, returned home only to be assigned arduous chores by his wife (like washing clothes or fishing), especially during the evening hours when other men were resting. Climbing a tall coconut tree is a metaphor for difficult work in the village, contrasted here with men’s main work, gardening in the bush (interior lands).

The self-confidence that some women felt in their dealings with their husbands could be expressed in the assertion *Kī heta te‘ e goua* (The key is here with me). The implication is that a woman could cause trouble for her husband if he decided to leave her because she would have to agree to a divorce.

However, another saying, *Ia jül pau* (One is very afraid) suggests that in some marriages it was the husband who dominated, such that his wife was afraid to contradict him or answer him back.

More generally, when spouses did not get along, it was said that *Sok ta kia* (The joint creaks)—a metaphor for the friction that takes place when a couple experience a lack of harmony.

Although the above sayings acknowledge that marital relationships can become dysfunctional, other sayings suggest that cooperation between husbands and wives was the norm. When spouses cooperated and accommodated one another—when *'Iet tauen se ‘on hara* (The axe head fits the handle) and *Moa ta pulou ka ‘uaf ta pulou* (The rooster is fat and the hen is fat)—marriage can be a state of bliss.

It was a common expectation for husbands and wives to take their spouse’s side in disputes with others, even with their own relatives—a
practice recognized in the observation that a married couple shared the same pillow (*Kuruag ‘esea he*). The saying is based on the assumption that husbands and wives were likely to have the same opinions regarding most matters.

Before presenting accounts of marital experiences from the life histories, it might be helpful to place them in perspective by exploring general patterns related to marriage in the period of our concern. Here are some statistical patterns that can serve as background indicators to the culture of marriage:

**Age at Marriage**

The data regarding age at marriage is quite consistent, both among those who shared their life stories and among the general population, there being no significant variation over time. For men the average age at first marriage is in the range of 22–23, for women 18–19.¹

**Proximity of Spouses**

With the exception of Pepjei, the smallest district in Rotuma, the majority of marriages took place between men and women from the same district, with the highest percentage in the district of Itu‘itu (74.8% for men, 79.4% for women). And with one exception (women from Itu‘muta), less than 20% of spouses came from more than one district away (see Table 1 on next page).
### Table 1
Proximity of Spouses’ Homes, by District 1881–1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Men Within District</th>
<th>Men Adjacent District</th>
<th>Men Other District</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Itu’muta</td>
<td>80 61.1%</td>
<td>32 24.4%</td>
<td>19 14.5%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itu’ti’u</td>
<td>459 74.8%</td>
<td>98 16%</td>
<td>57 9.3%</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juju</td>
<td>114 62.6%</td>
<td>44 24.2%</td>
<td>24 13.2%</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepjei</td>
<td>50 48.5%</td>
<td>44 42.7%</td>
<td>9 8.7%</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noatau</td>
<td>208 71.5%</td>
<td>32 11%</td>
<td>51 17.5%</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oinafa</td>
<td>180 64.5%</td>
<td>53 19%</td>
<td>44 16.5%</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>110 65.1%</td>
<td>36 21.3%</td>
<td>23 13.6%</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Women Within District</th>
<th>Women Adjacent District</th>
<th>Women Other District</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Itu’muta</td>
<td>80 51.9%</td>
<td>38 24.7%</td>
<td>35 23.4%</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itu’ti’u</td>
<td>459 79.4%</td>
<td>67 11.6%</td>
<td>52 9%</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juju</td>
<td>114 56.4%</td>
<td>71 35.1%</td>
<td>17 8.4%</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepjei</td>
<td>50 46.7%</td>
<td>40 37.4%</td>
<td>17 15.9%</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noatau</td>
<td>208 71%</td>
<td>41 14%</td>
<td>44 15%</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oinafa</td>
<td>180 70.6%</td>
<td>37 14.5%</td>
<td>38 14.9%</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhaha</td>
<td>110 63.2%</td>
<td>45 25.9%</td>
<td>19 10.9%</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Residence Patterns Following Marriage*

The preferred pattern, especially following an arranged marriage, was for the groom to move to the bride’s home, at least until after the birth of their first child. Marriages preceded by *fu’u* involved the boy going to stay in the girl’s home, while those preceded by *taupiri* involved the girl going to stay with the boy’s family.
However, a number of practical considerations could influence the couple’s choices, both immediately following their wedding and subsequently, as the years passed, including the relative need of the two families for additional labour and support, the availability of land to each family, the composition of each household, etc. The information provided by those who told their life stories suggests that unarranged marriages were quite common, with several individuals reporting taupiri or fu’u arrangements prior to marriage, and a number of others relating acceptance of de facto unions by parents who had not been involved in the selection of their children’s mates. More generally, residence following marriage showed a near-even distribution, with 21 couples going to live with the wife’s family, 24 with the husband’s. In 3 instances, the couple initially stayed with the wife’s family before moving to the husband’s side, and in 2 cases they moved from the husband’s to the wife’s side. ²

Marriage Statistics
Three types of statistics are generally used to compare marriage and divorce data between populations: crude marriage rate, crude divorce rate, and divorce-to-marriage ratio. The crude marriage rate consists of the annual number of marriages per 1,000 population. It gives a general overview of marriage within a population, but in its sample it does not take into account people who cannot marry, such as young children who are clearly not of marriageable age. The crude divorce rate consists of the annual number of divorces per 1,000 population, while the divorce-to-marriage ratio is the number of divorces compared to the number of marriages in a given year (the ratio of the crude divorce rate to the crude marriage rate). The data for Rotuma from 1881 to 1959 are contained in Table 2 (next page).³
Table 2
Marriage and Divorce Statistics, by Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Marriages</th>
<th>Average Marriages per year</th>
<th>Divorces</th>
<th>Average Divorces per year</th>
<th>Estimated Average Population</th>
<th>Crude Marriage Rate</th>
<th>Crude Divorce Rate</th>
<th>% Divorce : Marriage Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895–1903</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>2300</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904–1909</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2300</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910–1919</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920–1929</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2160</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930–1939</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2540</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940–1949</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2700</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950–1959</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2420</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noteworthy that the crude marriage rate in Rotuma fell from a high of 18.0 in the decade between 1910 and 1919 to a low of 7.2 in the decade from 1950 to 1959. This can be explained as a result of the dramatic increase of outmigration by individuals of marriageable age following World War II, as well as a decrease in the death rate of children, leading them to become a greater portion of the population.

To put things in perspective somewhat, we can compare the Rotuma data with statistics from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, although data from these three other countries are from a much later time period:

Average crude marriage rates:
- Rotuma (1895–1959) = 11.1
- Australia (2015) = 4.8
- New Zealand (2008) = 4.8
- United States (2014) = 6.9
Average crude divorce rates:
- Rotuma (1904–1959) = 1.4
- Australia (2015) = 2.0
- New Zealand (2008) = 2.0
- United States (2014) = 3.2

Divorce : Marriage ratio
- Rotuma (1904–1959) = 12.9
- Australia (2015) = 42
- New Zealand (2008) = 42
- United States (2014) = 46

These data, along with marital histories I collected from nearly all the adults living on Rotuma in 1960, suggest that, in general, marriages on Rotuma were quite stable throughout the period of our concern, with only 12 percent of first marriages terminated by separation or divorce (see Table 3, next page). Although the grounds for divorce in court were predominantly adultery (68.5 percent), this is likely a result of the fact that only three grounds for divorce were recognized by the court: adultery, cruelty, and desertion, with cruelty accounting for all 6 percent of cases (all women), and desertion for the remaining 25.5 percent (see Table 4, on p. 317). From my reading of the court records, it appears that most incidents of adultery took place after the couple were separated.
Table 3
Outcomes of First Marriages as of 1960, by Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Outcome Together</th>
<th>Marital Outcome Spouse Died</th>
<th>Marital Outcome Separated</th>
<th>Marital Outcome Divorced</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900–1909</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3 (42.9%)</td>
<td>4 (57.1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910–1919</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>9 (40.9%)</td>
<td>9 (40.9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (18.2%)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9 (24.3%)</td>
<td>24 (64.9%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>3 (8.1%)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920–1929</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>35 (54.7%)</td>
<td>22 (34.4%)</td>
<td>2 (3.1%)</td>
<td>5 (7.8%)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>32 (50.8%)</td>
<td>26 (41.3%)</td>
<td>2 (3.2%)</td>
<td>3 (4.8%)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930–1939</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>56 (69.1%)</td>
<td>15 (18.5%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
<td>7 (8.6%)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>65 (69.2%)</td>
<td>18 (19.2%)</td>
<td>6 (6.4%)</td>
<td>5 (5.3%)</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940–1949</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>104 (78.8%)</td>
<td>10 (7.6%)</td>
<td>6 (4.6%)</td>
<td>12 (9.1%)</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>119 (85.6%)</td>
<td>5 (3.6%)</td>
<td>6 (4.3%)</td>
<td>9 (6.5%)</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950–1959</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>100 (84.8%)</td>
<td>2 (1.7%)</td>
<td>13 (11.0%)</td>
<td>3 (2.5%)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>112 (85.5%)</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
<td>15 (11.5%)</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals 1900–1959</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>646 (72.0%)</td>
<td>143 (15.9%)</td>
<td>54 (6.0%)</td>
<td>54 (6.0%)</td>
<td>897</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjustments to Marriage

The transition from being single and relatively carefree to being a spouse and responsible adult could be difficult, involving new commitments, relationships with in-laws, and unfamiliar responsibilities. Many of the life story tellers commented on the burdens involved:
Man in his 50s: Married life was good for the first year, but after that I found out that married life is very hard. When I was young I could do anything I liked, but now it’s different because I had to listen to anything she wanted to say.

Man in his 50s: Life really changed. When I was single I went everywhere without asking somebody, but then I had to ask my wife’s permission before I went out from our house. How I regretted getting married so young.

Man in his 30s: When I was 21 years old I got married, and at the beginning I didn’t like it as much as when I was single, because I was used to going out in the night instead of staying home. After I got married I always had to stay home with my wife. That was something new for me and I didn’t like it.

Woman in her 60s: I didn’t like being married as much as when I was with my brothers and my father. After I had my first child sometimes my husband didn’t act so good to me, and I would cry and think of the time when I was living with my father and brothers. It wasn’t until after I had four children that I finally forgot all about my father and brothers; then I only thought about my children.

Woman in her 30s: Just after we got married I thought that we would be staying in the same mood throughout life. We were in great happiness. Both of us stayed home, not roaming like before. When I was single I went to any place I wished to; all I had to do was let my mother know. But now I find that life is growing harder and whatever I want to do I have to let my husband know, and I have to do as he wishes.

Woman, unknown age: At the beginning I was a bit shy and I was afraid that my husband might change his mind, and then my parents would be very angry at me. We still went to dances and shows, but I knew that I was living in a different state of life than before I was married. Every day I would think of the time when I was single. I had never made my parents or anyone else angry with me, and I
wondered how my husband and I were going to be. Sometimes I was a bit scared because I did not want us to have a row for useless matters.

In addition to homesickness when a person moved to his or her spouse’s home, relations with in-laws could sometimes become a serious enough problem to terminate a marriage, as the following cases illustrate:

*Man in his 60s:* We went to live in her home, and I found it hard to take care of such a big family. I wanted to be at my wife’s side all the time, and not have to work so hard. I spent most of my free time with my wife, but her relations seemed to hate me. Soon my wife had a baby daughter, but by that time I had had enough of her relatives, so I left my wife, without quarrelling, and went back home. People laughed at me and said that I ran away from my wife because I was too lazy, but I didn’t care about what the people said—I just couldn’t face my wife’s relations any more, so I didn’t go back to her.

*Man in his 60s:* My uncle was very angry with me but what could he do—I was already in the girl’s home. I went one day to tell him I was sorry and he told me everything about that girl’s family, but I loved the girl and couldn’t leave her. He told me that one day I would change my mind and would run away from my wife. I never suspected his words to be true but they did come true. We stayed together for two years and had only one daughter when I had a row with my wife’s parents and I went back home to my uncle.

*Man in his 30s:* We were married for only three years and then we separated because after we were married we lived together with her parents, and her mother’s way was not good. She always treated me like a child and would always tell me what to do. I couldn’t stand it any more so I finally left my wife with her mother and father.

*Man in his 30s:* I loved both my mother and my wife. At first my wife was very kind to my mother and helped her but
everybody should know what it’s like to take care of an old woman. A few months passed and my wife began grumbling to me about my mother but I took no notice. I told her that my mother was old and when she was wild with her to just go away and not face her. We stayed together for four years, but she didn’t take care of my mother properly and when I thought of how kindly my mother brought us up I made up my mind to send my wife back home.

Yet the narratives also included examples of good relations with in-laws:

*Man in his 30s:* I began to settle down and started to work in the plantations for the first time because I knew I was going to have to provide for a family of my own. Working in the plantations was harder than I expected, but I managed to do it. My wife was very kind to me and my parents and also to my grandmother. She knew that my mother was unable to walk properly and Granny was weak so she took all the family work for herself.

*Man in his 30s:* How different my life was from the time before I got married. Whenever I wished to go someplace I had to let my wife know first. She was so nice and kind to my mother, and so my mother seemed to love her more than I did.

*Woman in her 40s:* We got married even though I didn’t know the man before and I was a bit frightened of him, but he was very kind to me. Two weeks after our wedding we went to his home. He wanted us to live there. Soon after my brothers and sisters came and stayed with us. He took good care of us. He loved us and we stayed in his home as if we were living with our own parents. Now we have only two children living with us. We are still taking care of my brothers and sisters along with our children. I enjoyed having a family of my own, with nobody to speak to us except myself. Now my family is still the same and not even once has my husband grumbled about my brothers and sisters; he is the same every day and treats them so kindly, and our children are living happily with us.
Woman in her 40s: The boy was very kind, and when I brought him home he was kind to my mother. He worked very hard, so my mother stopped going to the bush like a man.

Religion was another issue that could influence the course of a marriage, although accommodations were often made in the interests of saving it.

Man in his 30s: The marriage was rather a broken one—we were more often separated than living together. My assumption is that the girl’s mother was strongly urging her daughter to go back to the Catholic church. I think she was more or less convinced that would be the right thing to do, and she tried to win me over to her side. I was not prepared to make a change nor were my parents and my close relations. She started going to her mother and staying there for long periods, which, I suppose, gave me too much opportunity to flirt around with Methodist girls from my side. Now and again she would return but things never got any better. And on the last occasion when she went home, in 1954, we separated for good.

Man in his 60s: We got married in her religion but later I went back to my old church. We had two sons and one belonged to my church while the other has the same religion as his mother. My parents didn’t like this kind of family—having two religions with the sons divided, but as long as my wife agreed to it that was enough.

Man in his 30s: A few years later [after separating from first wife] I got married again, and I found out that married life in Rotuma is not so bad if both our parents will be kind to us, or if we do not live together with them after we were married. When I got married in 1948 I became a Methodist to be of the same religion as my wife. Changing my religion was not hard for me because I really loved my wife and besides I like the Methodists.
The ban on divorce in the Catholic religion came into play to influence the life course of one woman in her 30s:

After a week had passed, and everybody had gone home leaving only our family, I realized how different married life was from when I was single. I found married life harder than unmarried life. I loved my husband very much and always did everything good for him. But after about five months something happened. One night about three o’clock in the morning my husband surprised me. He woke me up and asked me what I was going to do—go with him to his home or stay here? I was so startled that I couldn’t answer his question, so he asked me again. He said that he had taken all of his things back to his house, except his knife, which he was holding in his hand. I was frightened and told him that I would stay at home, so on that night we separated. From that night on I stopped loving him. Then, after five years, he came back to my parents one time and apologized to them for his mistakes and for the bad things he did to me and asked them to forgive him. He said he wanted to return to me at our home. I told him that if he promised not to do what he did before he could stay, but after one month, he got angry with me on one Sunday morning and went back to his house. Since then we have never been together, and I have never made anyone else my boyfriend.

After a year, I met a boy and he tried to make love to me. He was two years older than me but had never been married before. I loved him, but we were both Catholic, and I knew it would be very bad for me to make him my lover, because we both knew that a person cannot marry twice in Church if they have a husband or wife who’s still living. He went away to Fiji soon after that, but after about three years he came back to talk to me. I had told him to try and find another girl to marry, but he said that it was very hard for him to marry someone else knowing that I still didn’t have a husband. I told him to stop thinking of that, because we were both Catholic and knew the laws of the Church.
Despite such pitfalls, the great majority of marriages lasted, as indicated in Table 4, which was compiled from an analysis of marital histories ascertained from virtually all the adults resident on Rotuma during 1960. The data cover the outcomes of marriages dating back to 1900 through 1959, and they show that, throughout that period, 72 percent of first marriages were still intact, 15.9 percent had been terminated by the death of a spouse, and only 12 percent had ended by separation or divorce.

Table 4
Grounds for Divorce, by Plaintiff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Plaintiff</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Adultery</th>
<th>Cruelty</th>
<th>Desertion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904–1909</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>9 (36.0%)</td>
<td>8 (80.0%)</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>16 (54.%)</td>
<td>12 (70.6%)</td>
<td>2 (11.8%)</td>
<td>3 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910–1919</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>24 (58.5%)</td>
<td>17 (65.4%)</td>
<td>9 (34.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>17 (41.5%)</td>
<td>9 (50.0%)</td>
<td>4 (22.2%)</td>
<td>5 (27.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920–1929</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>29 (63.0%)</td>
<td>29 (96.7%)</td>
<td>1 (3.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>17 (37.0%)</td>
<td>15 (68.2%)</td>
<td>4 (18.2%)</td>
<td>3 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930–1939</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>17 (53.1%)</td>
<td>11 (64.7%)</td>
<td>6 (35.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>15 (46.9%)</td>
<td>10 (58.8%)</td>
<td>7 (41.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940–1949</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>12 (44.4%)</td>
<td>8 (66.7%)</td>
<td>4 (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>15 (55.6%)</td>
<td>8 (53.3%)</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
<td>5 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950–1959</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>14 (50%)</td>
<td>10 (71.4%)</td>
<td>4 (28.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>14 (50%)</td>
<td>10 (71.4%)</td>
<td>1 (7.2%)</td>
<td>3 (21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals 1904–1959</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>106 (53.0%)</td>
<td>84 (76.4%)</td>
<td>26 (23.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>94 (47.0%)</td>
<td>64 (60.4%)</td>
<td>13 (12.3%)</td>
<td>29 (27.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu + Wi</td>
<td>200 (100%)</td>
<td>148 (68.5%)</td>
<td>13 (6.0%)</td>
<td>55 (25.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many men and women of all ages expressed great satisfaction with married life, as in the following examples:

_Man in his 60s:_ [My wife] was a kind woman, and after I had stayed for a week at her family’s home I told her that I would like her to come with me to my parents, so she could look after my parents and me. She agreed and we went to my house, and my parents were very happy. They were so glad to see us they could hardly express their delight. My wife took good care of them, since they were old and couldn’t do their work properly like they could when they were strong.

_Man in his 40s:_ I got married while I was in school, to a half-European woman. I soon found married life the happiest time of my life. Every day when I came home she would prepare food for me. She was a kind woman and would save money—almost five shillings out of the six I made in a day’s work at Morris Hedstrom’s.

_Man in his 30s:_ I liked married life from the beginning. Living with the one I loved made me very happy. It also made me happy to have children and I like living with my family.

_Man in his 30s:_ I got married and found out that married life was the best because I had somebody to look after my needs.

_Man in his 30s:_ On my wedding day I wasn’t really myself. I was almost oblivious to what was going on. It wasn’t until about a week later that I really realised what had happened. So far I like married life very much. Sometimes I think about going out with the boys, but my wife’s family has been good to me, and that kind of compensates for my loss. Now I talk in the plural—I speak of we, and ours, instead of I and mine.

_Woman in her 60s:_ He was a kind man; he loved me and always did what I asked of him without a word. I guess that
my father wanted me to marry this man because he was a hard worker and he helped my father a great deal. My mother and I didn’t even have to do any fishing because my husband helped my father and they went fishing for us. What a good and kind husband I got!

*Woman in her 50s*: We got married in a few months and began a family of our own. I didn’t know how to work properly and yet I was lucky because I married a kind man. He helped me sometimes and always spoke kind words when we were together. We stayed together only four years and had one daughter, but unluckily my husband died. How could I imagine the one who loved me being put into his hidden home [his grave]; and our daughter was only about two years old.

*Woman in her 50s*: We got married and really loved each other very much. I was very happy because I was living with the one I loved best. Being married was better than being single. My husband was a very kind man and always did his best for me and our children, and I always did my best to take care of him, especially preparing the food to eat.

*Woman in her 40s*: We got married and we went to live in my husband’s home. We stayed happily together. My husband was so nice. He brought me nice food and everything I wanted before I could ask him to bring it. We stayed together for only five years when he died.

*Woman in her 30s*: We got married and it made me feel funny and strange in the beginning. I was, so to say, ashamed of my husband and most of the time I spent with my parents in their home. I was just getting used to being in this state of a married life when I went to stay with my husband. He was a nice man and loved my aunt and uncle as I did. We stayed together for a while with them before coming to his home, where we are staying now. We had more than ten children. My husband was so kind to me that we stayed together for many years without quarrelling. He
did his best to give me everything I would ask for and what our children need.

*Woman in her 30s:* After I was married I realized how very different married life was from single life. For me, married life was much better than my life before I was married. My husband did everything that I wanted better than anyone when I was living with my grandmother. I love my husband and he makes me very happy all the time.

*Woman in her 30s:* I got married in 1950, and I found out that for me married life was better than being single. My husband was very kind to me. He is even more kind to me than my mother or father. Sometimes they couldn’t get me what I wanted, but my husband always gets me whatever I want.

*Woman, unknown age:* We got married and lived in my home. People always gossiped about us because my husband had been a cheeky boy, but since he knew that he was now in a different stage of life he changed his manners and became a very good man towards me and my parents. He was kind, and whatever I asked of him he provided.

Even marriages that had gotten off to a rocky start generally worked out over time, as per the following examples:

*Man in his 60s:* During the first week after our wedding this girl still hated me and her parents had to speak to her. I tried my very best to speak to her too, and to show my kindness and later on we stayed nicely together as if there wasn’t anything that happened before. She began to do our work nicely and lead our family as she wished to.

*Man in his 60s:* My dreams came true and we did get married, but my relatives did not come to see my wife on that day. The words that my sisters said to my wife were not nice or kind to her, but I told her not to pay attention to them. I told her just to listen to me, for I would be the one
who would take care of her. My dear wife had a rough time with my people in the beginning, but she took no notice of them. We had our first child, but still my sisters hated my wife. My relatives were also very angry with me, just because they didn’t like the woman with whom I got married. They all went to their homes and stayed there, leaving me and my wife to look after my parents. My wife was so nice and kind to my parents that after a few years they fully accepted her and we made a happy family.

*Man in his 50s:* I found marriage all right, maybe because my parents chose the right one. My wife seemed to be unhappy at the beginning, because it was the first time she left her people. I felt responsible for her and did everything I could to make her happy. Whatever she wanted I tried my best to get it for her. After about a year she got fully adjusted.

*Man in his 30s:* I enjoyed married life and it helped me a lot with my work. I didn’t roam around so much and got enough sleep so I was able to work properly. By the way, before leaving Rotuma I went again to faksoro my mother-in-law and this time she told me all her reasons why she had objected [to my marrying her daughter], but she accepted my faksoro and we became very good friends after that.

*Man in his 20s:* I got married in 1955 when I was 19 years of age. Our first baby was born in 1956, and another baby was born this year. Our first child was a boy and second baby a girl. I had a lot of trouble before I got permission from my father to marry this girl. My father wouldn’t give his permission for me to marry her because we are very close relations. She is a third cousin to me, but all the same I just couldn’t help it. I love her and we love each other, and that is the main thing. Finally the old people gave in and so we married and are still living together now. We are having a very happy life together and I don’t think I will forget her as long as I live.
Secondary Marriages
After losing a spouse, whether by death, separation, or divorce, it was common for individuals to remarry or to engage with a new partner without legally marrying. Among the life story tellers, all six of those who had gotten divorced from their first wife, and six of eleven whose first spouse died, remarried. As with first marriages, some worked out more satisfactorily than others.

*Man in his 60s:* [After my first wife died,] I got married again and how different I found the people that time. People seemed to hate my new wife. This woman was also hated by my own children and then I noticed that she was not so nice as my first wife; there was really a great difference. Now we are staying for many years without a child, but since she’s my wife I love her.

*Man in his 50s:* I didn’t get married again until I was nearly 40 years old. By that time I had finally become a man and worked every day. This time I was a good husband and did whatever my wife wanted.

*Man in his 40s:* When my wife died I thought of her every day because I had to take care of the children. It was very hard for me to do without a woman to look after my children, so I got married again. This marriage was different from the one with my first wife. This wife is not as kind as the last one. The way she treats the children by my first wife is different than the way she treats her own. I do really love my wife, but sometimes I feel bad about the way she treats my children, so I decided to send my children to their mother’s side. Now I live alone with my wife and our own children, and it seems just the same now as in the beginning when I got married to my first wife.

*Man in his 30s:* [After I sent my first wife back home,] I wondered if I would be able to find another wife who would be as kind as my mother. I went out in the evenings and met another girl whom I married afterwards. We loved
each other and lived happily from the beginning after our wedding up to now. We haven’t got any children and yet I wish my mother were alive so she might see the difference between my first wife and the second wife. She’s really nice to me and even to the children of our neighbours. Everybody says that I was very lucky that I have a very kind wife but it’s really true.

*Woman in her 30s:* I felt very strange at the beginning of our marriage and I felt very embarrassed with my husband, but he acted as though he were a real man and a husband to me. We stayed together and I began to know what kind of character he really had, and I felt that I didn’t want this kind of man for a husband. We stayed together many years without children so I finally left him and went back to my mother ... after about two years I got married to another man whom I thought to be kinder than my first husband. I went to live in his home. At first he was nice and kind to me, but later on he didn’t allow me to go to any other house in the village. He didn’t like to see me laughing with anyone, and whenever he was angry at someone else he would come home and take it out on me. I had our first child—a baby girl—but still my husband acted the same to me. I was frightened at that time that he might kill me if I would try to run away from him, and because of his jealousy I just sat at home like a mouse caught in a trap. I couldn’t say a single word whenever he was angry. Instead of being happy I was sadder than a slave. We have stayed together for many years now and have had about ten children, but my husband has not really changed much. Many times I thought of leaving him, but I didn’t know who would take care of my children if I did. I wish he could change his manners and be like my stepfather who brought me up.

My mother’s second husband died and she came to live with me and brought her daughter with her. But we were all the same to my husband—we had to do everything according to his wishes. Never mind if I was ready to give birth to a child, he would make me go with him to work in his plantations or cut copra. What a life! I never saw another woman who has worked as hard as I have done. I
have stuck it out because I wanted to avoid quarrelling,
because we already had many children and I felt sorry for
them. But I know he won’t change his character.

Notes to Chapter 16

1 I consulted several sources to determine ages of individuals. The most
reliable were birth, marriage, and death records maintained by Rotuma’s
resident commissioners and district officers dating back to 1881, following
cession to Great Britain. I copied and eventually digitized all the records
from 1903, when the recording of two names rather than one made it
easier to distinguish people from one another. For those individuals
included in these records, calculating age at marriage was simply a matter
of subtracting birthdate from marriage date. A second source of data was
the self-reported ages of bride and groom at the time the marriage was
recorded. Comparisons with calculated ages showed that the self-reporting
was quite unreliable, with discrepancies sometimes ranging several years.
Nevertheless, for individuals not included in the birth records, this was the
best indicator of age available.

2 Residence information was acquired from an island-wide census
conducted by Rotuman research assistants that included residential
histories, as well as from sequential birth histories.

3 The data for Table 2 were obtained from marriage records and from
recordings of divorce proceedings by the magistrate’s court at the
government station on Rotuma.
Chapter 17

Parenting

The focus of this chapter is on attitudes, emotional commitments, and strategies of child rearing among Rotuman parents in 1960. My analysis is based on comments made by a selection of individuals in their life stories and on interviews with fifty mothers concerning their practices with regard to feeding, toilet training, and disciplining their children. The mother interviews sought information about the sharing of children with relatives and namesakes (siga), and the mothers’ hopes for their children’s futures; they also included a question regarding what they told their children about death. Background data about children’s births (and deaths) were obtained from the colonial records up to 1960.

As was evident in the recollections of those telling their life stories, a great many had experienced their own childhood as a period of being indulged by loving parents, whether or not their families were well off. The theme of struggling to provide everything possible for their children is also reflected in the remarks of parents, often accompanied by assertions of loving sentiments and expressions of pride.

Mothers and fathers of all ages gave direct expressions of love and affection, as in the following examples:

*Woman in her 60s who had eight children but one daughter died in infancy:*
My husband and I stayed for many years and we had seven children: five sons and twin daughters. How lucky we were to have these children, making a large family. My husband worked very hard to support us with everything we needed, and he treated our children so kindly that it made me think of my parents who were always kind to me until they died.*
Woman in her 40s whose two daughters died in infancy; she also had two sons, one of whom died at the age of 7:
How could you imagine the sadness that overtook me when my daughters died, one after the other. I wanted a daughter because I love girls, so because we had no more children, I took my cousin’s daughter and then a son and adopted them as my own. How I love kids to be with me at home.

Woman in her 30s who had eight children, all alive in 1960:
I love my husband and he makes me very happy all the time. Now we have eight children and they, too, make me happy. I love my children even more than I love my husband.

Woman in her 30s who had a son and a daughter, both alive in 1960:
Now everyone can see that I am very happy living among my neighbours with my children—a family of our own, with my eldest son working and supplying all our needs.

Man in his 50s who had five sons and five daughters, one of whom died at the age of 4:
After my children grew up, I felt very sorry to see them stay away from home, and I wish they were here with me.

Man in his 30s who had three daughters and one son, all alive in 1960:
After we had our first two children, I got used to staying home and by that time I liked married life. I wouldn’t like to live like I did when I was single again. I love my children and I don’t like to leave them. I want to be with them all the time.

Parents’ comments often emphasized the struggle required to provide for children, who were especially precious given high rates of infant and child mortality:

Man in his 60s who had nine children, three of whom died; three sons and three daughters were alive in 1960:
We had several children and I felt a bit worried about them, because children are not easy to bring up. I worked very hard to earn money to supply them with their wants.
Woman in her 60s who had five children with her first husband but three had died by the age of 3; two sons survived. She had two daughters with her second husband but one died at age 25:
I had two daughters and we have done our best so that they wouldn’t cry for anything. They were our only daughters and my husband worked very hard and brought fruits and food—anything they would ask him for. We sent them to school…. Sometimes I helped my husband cut copra, because this was the only means to get money, and whatever my daughters wanted in the store we always had to get for them. I brought them up and taught them everything my parents had taught me when I was small.

Woman, age unknown, who had eight sons, one of whom died in infancy:
We have had many children and I realize that my parents must have had a really hard life with the seven of us. I had to do all the work for my children and not one of them could help either me or their father. I am doing my best to give them everything they need. I always give them my advice so that they would be smart in school and study hard because I know that this is the easier way to a better life. Unless one gets a good job he or she has to cut copra and plant to earn his living, and I do hope all my children will take the right path and lead a good life.

Woman in her 30s who had seven sons and three daughters; one of the boys died in childhood:
My husband and I have about ten children and we are doing our best to afford them with their needs. I can remember that my parents had a hard time doing the same thing for us when we were young.

Woman in her 30s with a son born prior to marriage and three daughters with her husband, all alive in 1960:
Now we have four children and I realize that I am leading a harder life than I had ever dreamt of. I have to work hard now to keep my children clean and healthy. I try to treat them nicely, the way my parents treated me. Sometimes I feel sorry for them because I know that I will not get everything they need like my parents did for me when I was small. Now I just pray that my children will grow up to love each other and to lead a good life.
Many parents, including some of those quoted above, expressed concern for their children’s accomplishments, whether or not they were doing well:

*Man in his 70s who had twelve children, five of whom died; three sons and four daughters were alive in 1960:*
We had many children. I worked very hard and tried all possible ways to earn a living and send them to school. My oldest son studied hard and is now working in the agricultural department. Another is an assistant medical practitioner, and my four daughters are all married.

*Man in his 60s who had seven sons, one of whom died:*
I did my best for my sons and sent them to Fiji for further education, but only the two youngest came out with good results. When they left school they received higher wages in their employment. Five of my sons have married, one has died, and the youngest of them is still roaming. I did my very best when they were young so that they would grow up kind-hearted and be nice to everybody—young or old—whomever they would meet.

*Man in his 50s who had four daughters and eight sons, one of whom died in infancy:*
We have done our very best to earn money for our living and sent them to school, and yet the oldest children came out without any success. They seemed to follow in my footsteps. What a pity to think of the money I had spent on them and not one had succeeded in school. The boys came home and helped me working in the plantations while the girls helped their mother take care of home and the younger children. I am sending my children over to Fiji so that they can get good jobs and earn enough to help support us.

*Man in his 50s who had three sons and three daughters, all alive in 1960:*
Now I have six children. The oldest daughter got married two years ago to a European minister in Australia and the next oldest girl is a school teacher in Motusa. My eldest son is at the Suva Grammar School; he’s taking a special course, since he passed his University entrance (New Zealand) last year. My third oldest girl is at Adi Cakabau secondary school; she passed her senior Cambridge, but she’s sitting for her university entrance this year. The two youngest children are here in the Malhaha school, both in Class 7.
Man in his 30s who had five sons and three daughters, all alive in 1960:
I feel like I have a big responsibility in my children and worry about how I will be able to pay for their secondary school education…. Before I retire I’d like to build a house for myself and my children. My biggest concern is that my children get a good education and a good job.

There were also a few admissions of favouritism towards one or more children, such as these:

Man in his 60s who had six sons (four of whom died between the ages of 7 and 19) and four daughters (two of whom died in infancy):
I loved all my children, but I think my twin sons were the closest to me. One of them died when he was about six years old, and the other just died at the beginning of this year.

Man in his 60s who, with his first wife, had a daughter and a son (who died); with his second wife he had five sons and a daughter, all alive in 1960:
My [second] wife and I … have had six children—five boys and one girl. We have done our best to give them everything they needed. I love all of them but I think both of us, my wife and I, love our daughter more than our five sons. That is because in our custom boys grow up and are able to take care of themselves, but when girls grow up they are unable to supply themselves with what they need because we have to cut copra to earn money for our living. Since she was our only daughter we have always done our best to give her whatever she would ask for.

The next section provides an analysis of the practices reported by the mothers in their interviews, along with some additional background.
Analysis of Mother Interviews

The interviews with mothers provide valuable information about several aspects of parenting, including the sharing of children with relatives and namesakes (siga'a), breastfeeding and weaning, toilet training, discipline, maternal aspirations for their children, and what mothers told their children concerning death. The women ranged in age from 24 to 57 and had between 2 and 9 children in their households (Table 1). What follows is a statistical analysis of their situations and responses in each of the areas of child-rearing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Mothers</th>
<th>Average Number of Children at Home</th>
<th>Number of Households with Children Under Age 20 Living Elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Residential Patterns

All but two mothers reported incidents of their children staying with another family for a certain amount of time (ranging for a week or so to several years). I consider the information incomplete regarding children visiting for a period of time with families elsewhere because I believe most women were providing examples of such visits rather than a complete inventory. But the data nevertheless suggest patterns of sharing children with other families, which was very much a part of Rotuman culture.
during this period. The sharing of children was an expression of mutual commitment and a way of strengthening ties between families.

Table 2 (below) shows the distribution of children living with or staying for periods of time with families elsewhere. The pattern of sharing only slightly favoured the mother’s relatives (29 to 23), with the differential accounted for mainly by a greater number in the grandparent generation on the mother’s side. The data also suggest the importance of sigoa as hosts of children. The Christmas school holiday (mane‘u) was a frequently cited as a time for children to be away from home, staying with relatives or namesakes.

Table 2
Adults other than Parents Hosting Children under Age 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relatives</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s relatives, mother’s generation (MoBr, MoSi, MoCousin):</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s relatives, mother’s parents’ generation (MoMo, MoFa, MoAunt, MoUncle):</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s relatives, father’s generation (FaBr, FaSi, FaCousin):</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s relatives, father’s parent’s generation (FaMo, FaFa, FaAunt, FaUncle):</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling (Si, StepBr):</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigoa (Namesake):</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding School, College:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breastfeeding and Weaning

All but three of the mothers interviewed had breastfed their infants. The three who did not do so reported that they were advised by the doctor not to. Another three mothers breastfed some but not all of their children, especially those born later. Asked when they began to give their children solid food, the great majority (38; 76%) reported between 3 and 5 months, with the remaining 12 reporting between 6 and 10 months. The main solid food mentioned was tapioca (tapiko) with milk, although pawpaw,
sago, and soft coconut were also mentioned. Age of weaning was reported as 1 year by 31 of the 47 (66%) mothers who breastfed. Of the remainder, 15 mothers (32%) reported weaning between 8 and 11 months, and one weaned at 13 months. That weaning at 1 year was the norm is not surprising since a child’s first birthday is marked by a ceremony that celebrates the transition to childhood. In earlier years, it was customary for grandparents to take the child to stay with them following that ceremony, which also facilitated the process of weaning.

Toilet Training
Almost all the mothers reported using a small pot to begin toilet training at first but sending the children outside, or specifically to the beach, to defecate once they were able to walk (the common procedure was for the children to go on the beach below the water line so the faeces would be washed away at high tide). A few mothers mentioned digging a hole and burying the faeces or picking it up with a coconut shell to throw it into the sea. The majority (30; 60%) reported that their children completed toilet training (able to use adult facilities that included inland latrines and toilets built on piers over the ocean) by the age of 4, and an additional 15 (30%) reported that their children completed the process by age 5. Asked how they reacted when a child soiled him or herself, half of the mothers responded that they either scolded the child or administered some form of punishment before cleaning up the mess. The other half simply reported cleaning up without any mention of punitive measures.

Responses to Misbehaviour
The most frequently mentioned forms of misbehaviour were disobedience (40; 80%), followed closely by saying “bad words” (38; 76%). Of lesser
concern were acting cheeky (12; 24%), touching things that belonged to others (11; 22%), and going or staying away without permission (9; 18%). The main forms of punishment for such behaviours mentioned by the mothers were hitting the child (41; 82%), making the child kneel for a period of time (29; 58%), and scolding the child (20; 40%). Also mentioned was isolating the child (7; 14%), requiring the child to do chores of some kind (4; 8%), depriving the child of a meal or of certain kinds of food like meat or fish (4; 8%), and pinching (3; 6%).

Two Rotuman sayings advise parents not to threaten children frivolously or to punish them too often. The saying ‘A ‘a’ak ma la ‘a ([If you repeat a threat [that ghosts will come to eat your children], it will happen] implies the need to be cautious about threatening children with ghosts, because speech has power. The saying ‘Ül rua’ia sin (Thick skin) is based on the notion that frequent spanking results in thickening the skin so that the child no longer feels pain when hit.

In response to a separate question regarding children’s disrespectful behaviour either to one’s parents or to others, the mothers reported much less punitive reactions, emphasizing the teaching of correct behaviour (24; 48%), particularly in the presence of visitors or when visiting other households (15; 30%). The association of being respectful and being loved was also mentioned by a few of the mothers (5; 10%). The most frequent form of punishment mentioned for disrespectful behaviour was scolding (22; 44%), while only a few reported hitting (8; 16%) or making the child kneel (3; 6%).

The Rotuman saying Tük’akia ‘ou muri (Bump your bottom) was used to command a child to sit down and stop roaming around. As explained in Elizabeth Inia’s book Füeag ‘es Füaga, the saying—or its harsher form Tük’akia ‘ou poto’i (Sit your buttocks down)—was used to scold
children who did not stay home, requiring their parents to go out looking for them for meals, and so on. It was also said to a child who was showing off and acting unruly in front of visitors. In Rotuman custom it is impolite for children to move about in front of visitors. They should sit down and be quiet.

To get an idea of how the mothers responded to their children fighting, two separate questions were asked: one concerning one’s children fighting among themselves, and another about their fighting with other children. The most common response to one’s children fighting among themselves was scolding (21; 42%) followed by hitting (17; 34%), although six of the mothers specified that hitting was only administered to the one who was blamed. Separation or isolation of the children who were fighting with one another was favoured by ten of the mothers (20%), while three respondents claimed that they did not interfere. Seven (14%) mothers reported that they admonished their children to love one another and not fight.

When children caught fighting with children from other households, the reactions were highly patterned, with 42 (84%) of the mothers reporting that they called their children home and 28 (56%) said they forbid them to play any more with the children with whom they were fighting. Seven (14%) of the mothers expressed explicit concern that the fighting among children could result in strained relations with other families, although this was implicit in almost all the responses. Five (10%) of the respondents said they told their children to love other children and be friendly with them instead of fighting.

The matter of punishing children by hitting them requires some discussion. Hitting a child for misbehaving can vary from a mild symbolic tap on the legs or buttocks to a severe beating causing real pain and
possibly causing physical injury. It can be administered in uncontrolled anger or coolly as part of a learning experience. There is also the matter of frequency—how often physical punishment is administered to children. I can confidently say that in the year I spent in Rotuma during 1960 (and many times since 1989), I never saw a child struck in anger or with the apparent intent to cause pain; in fact, I can’t remember seeing a child struck at all. I only recall numerous instances of children being coddled and indulged. But that doesn’t mean much, not only because memory cannot be trusted but because punishments would likely have been administered within households and not in public. Still, when I checked with some of my older Rotuman friends, if they recalled being hit by their parents for misdeeds it was generally with a mild tap on the legs with a native broom (taufiare, which is made from the mid-ribs of coconut leaflets, parafa) or the edge of a fan (siva) to any part of the body. As described to me, such incidents were more a matter of giving emphasis to a scolding than to cause pain. In her comments regarding the Rotuman saying Jau sasasa (To beat sasasa fekei), Elizabeth Inia wrote that the reference is to the sound of the paraf when spanking a child; it sounds like the beating of breadfruit for making sasasa, a kind of Rotuman pudding made from cooked, skinned breadfruit, put inside a fakmaru (fanpalm) leaf and beaten with a stick, after which it is cut in slices and put in a banana leaf with coconut cream mixed with salt water. Mrs. Inia reported that the saying is “a metaphoric reference to a child’s being disciplined. Coconut leaf midribs (parafa) are light, but broad, and make a clapping sound when striking the skin. They make lots of noise but do not hurt much. Mothers often use parafa to threaten children when they are naughty.”

To the extent that more severe punishments occurred, they seem to have been more likely administered by fathers than by mothers.
However, the recollections of the Rotumans who were interviewed suggest that such incidents were relatively rare. The reflections of one man in his 20s seem to be rather characteristic:

My relationship with my parents was just a normal one of respect and affection. I might resent it sometimes if they would punish me for something, but nothing very intense. I would fight with my brothers and sisters sometimes—just the usual sorts of thing. My father gave me most of the discipline. To a certain extent he was strict. He would tell me something once and would never repeat it. The second time he would give me a hiding or make me skip a meal. My mother was more or less the reverse. She was the one who gave me all the comfort; if I made a mistake she wouldn’t belt me straight away. She more or less talked to me and tried to teach me.

*Hopes for Their Children’s Future*

In response to a question regarding their ambitions for their children, the majority expressed hopes for a good education, independence, and a good job. Nearly half also mentioned being well behaved. Table 3 (on the next page) shows the distribution of responses.
Table 3
Rotuman Mothers’ Ambitions for Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambitions</th>
<th>Number of Mothers</th>
<th>Percent of Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get a Good Education</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Independence</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a Good Job</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Well Behaved</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Happy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Good Luck</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Well</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Hard</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Loved</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Healthy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember What Taught</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Looked After by God</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Telling Children about Death

The final item in the questionnaire concerned what the mothers told their children regarding death. (I put this item in the questionnaire because I was interested in cultural patterns of grieving and dealing with death.)

Only 31 of the mothers responded to this question, with nearly half (15; 48%) reporting they told their children that the dead person had gone to Heaven and/or was with God. Nine (29%) told their offspring that the dead person went to the moon (or to visit the man in the moon); six (19%) told them that the dead person went to ‘Oroi, the traditional realm of the dead under the sea; and one person said that the deceased went to
“another world for a holiday.” What is especially interesting is that, regardless of destination, sixteen (52%) of the mothers reported telling their children that the dead person would be back soon. The implication, if I understand it correctly, is that death does not permanently remove a person from the arena of social relations, which is a conclusion Jan and I reached in our analysis of Rotuman graves.²

Notes to Chapter 17

1 For an analysis of the contrast between Rotuman and Western attitudes toward death, see “Cultural Values and Attitudes Towards Death,” by Alan Howard and Robert A. Scott, Journal of Existentialism 6:661–674 (1965).
Rotumans have earned respect as hard workers, as well as a reputation for diligence and responsibility. They were valued as sailors by European sea captains precisely for these traits. For example, in June 1834, Captain John Eagleston of the Emerald wrote in the ship’s log that Rotumans “make good ship men” and “for a trading vessel are preferable to any of the other natives I am acquainted with, they being more true & faithful & more to be depended on.”1

On Rotuma, work mainly revolved around the production and preparation of food and pandanus mats. Men’s work primarily involved preparing and tending gardens of taro, yams, bananas, and other crops; in addition, they cut and dried coconut meat for exportation as copra. Women’s work traditionally centred on the making of mats and keeping the home and its surroundings well groomed. Both men and women fished, husbanded domestic animals, prepared food and cooked. Equal in importance to work within the domestic sphere was communal effort—work on behalf of the church and community. This generally involved efforts similar to those within the household, because feasting was a central part of most communal activities. During the period we are concerned with, an individual’s worth was judged primarily on the basis of his or her reputation as a worker and producer.

A number of sayings contained in Elizabeth Inia’s 1998 collection (Fāeag ‘es Fūaga) refer to the importance of hard work for a person’s reputation. Perhaps the sayings that best sum up Rotuman attitudes are the biblically derived Kōp la pumahan (You have to sweat) and Taria ma mah.
ʻon ʻono (One receives one’s just deserts). Both convey the message that success is a result of the work one puts into a project, and that only hard workers deserve success. Other sayings urge individuals to work hard to achieve their goals and praise those who are known as hard-working. Thus a particularly hard-working man is known as a “hardwood post” indicating his reliability, or as having a “hairy heart,” suggesting that there is more to him than just a hairy chest. In contrast a shirker may be likened to a cock who fights intermittently, implying unreliability.

The value of working together to achieve success is the point of the saying, Moa ta pulou ka ʻraf ta pulou (The rooster is fat and so is the hen). This refers not only to husbands and wives who prosper as a result of their joint efforts but also to successful events that are the product of contributions by many. Work is even prescribed as an alternative to anger in the saying Fek ʻon Nohu (Nohu’s anger), which suggests that when people work hard, and work together, social harmony will prevail, while the phrase ʻOtom pumahana ji (Our sweat runs down) reminds the beneficiaries of communal work of their corresponding responsibilities.²

The personal recollections of the life story tellers in this chapter are organized in sections according to where they worked (on plantations or for wages on Rotuma, and abroad) and specific occupations (teachers, nurses, and religious callings).

Working on Plantations at Home in Rotuma
As noted in chapter 15, the great majority of men and women during this period remained in Rotuma following their time in school. Young women were expected to learn and practice the basic chores of womanhood, including weaving mats, preparing and cooking food, looking after younger children, and cleaning the family compound. Young men, in
contrast, were granted a great deal of freedom to roam about (usually in groups) and to get involved in various kinds of mischief. However, despite freedom allotted them, young men were not entirely free from societal responsibility. They formed the nucleus of communal labour in every village, but even this obligation was not regarded as an imposition since most events requiring their labour involved feasting and fun as well as work. The opportunity to work together with one’s friends was looked upon with relish rather than dismay. The young men also did some farming and fishing, but since they were not under an obligation to provide for their families if adult males were present in the household, there was little pressure on them to produce regular supplies. Usually they planted gardens that they farmed together on ground requisitioned from one of the larger land-holders in their locality.

In some families, however, the labour contributions of young men were needed to maintain the family’s food supply, so from the time they left school they committed themselves to working on family plantations, generally under the tutelage of their father or elder brothers. The accounts below reflect the pride that young men took in learning to be good farmers and being able to take on the role of providers for their families.

*Man in his 60s:* I came home and helped my father and brother work on their plantations. I tried my very best to help them and show them that I could be a good farmer, so that one day my father could stay at home and I would be able to support our family with food.

*Man in his 60s:* After [leaving school] I began to help my father in his plantations. After coming back I would often talk with my friends about the work, and the things I had been doing. My friends began to praise me and that caused me to work more eagerly. I wanted others to praise me so I worked hard.
times I took my friends up to my father’s plantations and showed off my work.

*Man in his 60s:* After [leaving school] I never went to school again, but stayed home and helped my father with his plantations. I spent day after day in the bush helping him and trying my very best, so that one day I would be able to work as well as my father did then.

*Man in his 60s:* I grew up and I began to help my father in his plantations. Then I began to notice that my father was a hard-working man. He perspired day after day to supply the family with food and cut copra to earn money for Mother and the children.”

*Man in his 40s:* Although I was only 15 years old, I brought food into our kohea [native kitchen] like an old man. I cut copra and worked in every possible way to earn money for my mother and sister. I gave them everything they would need before they would ask me.”

*Man in his 40s:* Many times I went with my stepfather to his plantations and he showed me how to plant and told me to work hard and learn well how to work in a plantation, so that one day I might be able to keep a plantation by myself without anybody to lead me. I worked with him and helped him as best I could.

**Employment on Rotuma**

Employment opportunities were quite limited on Rotuma in 1960, with almost all the available jobs accounted for by three employers: the two firms, Burns Philp and Morris Hedstrom; the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA); and the colonial government. As I recorded in my field notes from that year, 16 Rotumans were working for Morris Hedstrom or Burns Philp, not only as copra handlers but as clerks, storekeepers, carpenters and other skilled laborers; 28 others reported working for the government, including 14 teachers, 1 nurse, and 3 clerks. The nascent RCA employed 23 Rotumans as storekeepers, secretaries, skilled workers and manual laborers. Three other people worked for private individuals
and one, a minister, was employed by the Methodist Church. The Catholic Church employed two priests, at least one brother, and a complement of nuns, some of whom taught while others supported the priests in various capacities.

In addition, a number of Rotumans who were skilled (majao) in the traditional arts, such as massage (sarao) or canoe making, were able to generate some income of a non-monetary kind (for example, food, mats, or kava). One man, born in the 1920s, followed in his grandmother’s footsteps by doing sarao for a time, before going to work for the RCA:

When I was about 15, my grandmother gave me her oil so that I could help her do massage (sarao). I later became a masseur and was using “magic” (rē ‘ai) and many people came to me to be massaged. I also was called to go to people’s homes to do the same work. When I was doing this work I was called tafmakia, which means (taf = light, ma = and, kia = sun’s rays). Light and strength always comes up with the sun, so whatever I did, whether good or bad, people were frightened to talk about it. At that time I never helped my father in his plantations or elsewhere; I just went roaming around on my bicycle from house to house doing the same work (massaging) every day…. Now I am older and wiser…. I am now a driver for one of the R.C.A. lorries, hoping that my work will be of value for everyone in the family.

Some who were employed by the firms or the cooperatives found the work to their liking and stayed for long careers; others left and went on to other roles or occupations:

*Man in his 20s:* I was getting ready to go back to Suva early in 1953 but unfortunately I didn’t because the manager of Morris Hedstrom Ltd Rotuma had seen my father about me working in the office. He said that his clerk has passed away that week and that he needed a young fellow to help him in the office. I had to go to work to please the old man, but it was against my will. My ambition was that when I complete my secondary education I
would go in for doctor or barrister. Anyhow, I started work for MH Ltd on January 19th, 1953. It was not long after that they sent a clerk from HQ in Suva to Rotuma, and when this fellow came I left MH’s and went back to Suva. That was in May 1953.

I got back to Suva and was admitted to the Marist Brothers High School and continued my secondary education. By the end of the year I was supposed to sit for the Junior Cambridge (Overseas) but I came back to Rotuma again for Christmas and this time my old man wouldn’t let me go back to school again and saw the manager again about me working. I started again in December of that same year and am still working for MH Ltd today.

During my time here, there have been a lot of changes. There have been three managers, and all the office hands have all got the boot except me.

*Man in his 50s:* I was chosen to be the overseer in the plantations for the Juju Cooperative Society. After two years I got tired of the people and left my work and chose someone else to take my place.

*Man in his 30s:* After I was made the overseer [at Burns Philp] I found it hard at first, but I discovered that if you are a kind person and know your job well, it isn’t too difficult. I stayed at B.P.’s until 1953 when I … moved to my wife’s home to become the faufisi [second ranking chief] of the district and also a fa ʻes hoaga [head of a section of a district]. Later on I was made the chairman of the local co-op…. I had to think all the time about the welfare of the people. But I found it hard only in the beginning, and when I got used to it, it wasn’t too bad because I knew what to do and my only problem was telling the people to do it.

**Employment Abroad**

From very early on, following European intrusion, Rotuman men took the opportunity to sail aboard European vessels as crewmen. Some never returned to Rotuma, others did. The stories ex-sailors told about their adventures fired the imaginations of many of the young men on the island, some of whom sought shipboard employment. For example:
Man in his 50s: My father ... sent me to Fiji. I sailed on a sailboat and learned that being a sailor is the most happy thing a man can do. I was chief engineer, and got £12 a month."

Man in his 30s: I asked my father to send me to Fiji and he did, when I was about 19 years old. After I was in Fiji for a while, I got a job as a sailor on an overseas boat. I sailed to some big places, like Australia and America. There I saw the most wonderful things I had ever seen in my whole life. On my first visit to one of those countries I couldn’t believe it. It was so wonderful that I thought I might be coming to enter heaven. The moving of the lights and the colours were fantastic. The first trip I was afraid, but when I got used to it I liked it very much. I saw plenty of beautiful and exciting things and for a while I couldn’t think of anything else. I think that when I was sailing it was the happiest time of my life. When you’re a sailor you can see plenty of new and exciting things. I also saw the most beautiful girls that I had ever seen. Some of them were so beautiful that when I saw their faces I couldn’t believe they were real people.

Other opportunities for employment were available in Fiji, to which, following World War II, Rotumans emigrated in increasing numbers. Various possibilities included the Fiji army, the various firms, and jobs requiring skilled labour, as the following accounts illustrate:

Man in his 30s: When I was about 19 years old I went to Fiji and joined the army. I liked being in the army very much; it was more fun than the time that I was in Rotuma. In the army I was always with my friends and sometimes we all got drunk together and sang songs, and other times we got drunk and we all would go to a dance together.

Man in his 20s: I got a job in customs.... I started out as a license clerk at 16 pounds a month, and another fellow had a job as senior clerk for 80 pounds a month. He proved to be incompetent, and the comptroller of customs asked me if I could try the job, since I had more or less proved myself. So we switched jobs. I thought that I would receive his salary, but after six months I was still getting
only 16 pounds a month and the fellow who took my job was still getting 80…. So I quit that job.

I went over to Burns Philp and told them everything, and they told me they would start me at the same pay as the government, 16 pounds a month, but if I proved myself they would give me a raise. I started in November, and in December I got my raise and was transferred to Rotuma. I came to Rotuma in January, 1957.

*Man in his 50s:* It was a great pleasure for me to arrive in Fiji—the land that I had hoped to see since I was a small boy. I managed to get a job as a carpenter. One time, when we went to the other side of the island to work, I met a girl and fell in love with her, so I left my work and stayed back in the girl’s village and married her…. These people didn’t want me to work, so they made me feel much lazier than I should have been…. Now I’m old and weak and can’t work properly, but there isn’t anybody to look after me, so I have to do my best and do all my work everyday.

*Man in his 30s:* The headmaster sent me to Morris Hedstrom Ltd. to take a job in the shipping office. I stayed there for about a month, but almost every afternoon I would go to the police training depot and play ping-pong and cricket with the Rotuman fellows there. I became interested in the police department and decided to join. For one thing I was only getting 8/6 per week at MH, and since I didn’t have anyone to take care of me I couldn’t get along very well on that, so I joined the police as a recruit on the 6th of February, 1942.

I trained as a recruit for three months and took the police examination and did so well they made me a second class constable. I was assigned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Suva. I stayed with the CID for about two years and found it very interesting. I worked in the office most of the time, but went out sometimes. One thing, I think that working with fingerprints ruined my eyes, and I’ve had to wear glasses ever since.

After two years I was assigned to the Immigration and Licensing Department. I stayed there for about ten years up until 1954. I found the work hard, but interesting. One thing I didn’t like: besides our regular weekly hours we were on night call and sometimes on weekends….

I resigned from the Immigration Department because of false promises and bad working conditions. I applied to the Colonial
Secretary for a transfer and in July 1954 I went to the Income Tax Department. I stayed there for two years, until June 1956, when I was transferred to administration, to which I had applied. I asked to be sent to Rotuma and was assigned to Rotuma as the clerk of the district. I felt I had served Fiji long enough and wanted to serve my own people for a change. Last year the job of sub-accountant was also transferred to the clerk, whereas before it had been done by the District Officer. I feel that the work I have to do now is far too much work for one man.

And in one case, at least, serendipity resulted in a young man being recruited by an American soldier during the Second World War:

*Man in his 30s:* I met an American sergeant one day, in 1941 or 1942…. For the next eight years or so, I worked for this sergeant, whose job was to check American mechanical equipment throughout the Pacific. We went to the Gilberts, Carolines, Marshalls, Samoa, and Hawai‘i, and even as far as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. At the end of this time I was a technical sergeant myself.

Then one day my boss told me that he was going to the Carolines to be discharged, and at this same time there was a demand for a person who could take care of some outboard motors and other mechanical equipment and who could speak a little bit of Gilbertese, to conduct a scientific expedition to the Gilbert group. My boss suggested that I go with them and then rejoin him in the Marshalls and we would go “home” to America together.

I spent several months with the expedition in the Gilberts, and when they were preparing to leave, I told the expedition leader that I was staying on. He tried to persuade me to go, realising that there was a woman involved, but I refused. So they left without me.

*Specific Occupations*

Students who successfully completed secondary schooling in Fiji sometimes had opportunities to go on for professional degrees. Three of the more popular choices were teaching, nursing, and the clergy. Those whose life
stories are included in this book, of course, are among the ones who eventually obtained positions back on the island.

Teachers

Man in his 30s: I passed the [Qualifying Examination] at the end of 1946. After I passed the exam I went right to Suva, before school closed down, and got a job. I didn’t know I had passed and was awaiting the result. I got a job sorting mail in the post office. I worked there for two weeks and quit because I didn’t like it, so I got a job as an office boy in a legal firm. I didn’t like that job much, either. I would have stayed there, but three weeks after I had joined that firm I learned that I had passed the exam, and I decided to go into the Nasinu Training College and become a teacher.

I always wanted to become a teacher. The first impression that I wanted to be a teacher was one day when I about 8 or 9 years old and I saw Ratu Edward Cakabou. He was a visiting teacher then. I was more or less attracted by the man’s personal appearance, and I thought that if I were to become a teacher I might one day get a job like his, which was very highly regarded. He was highly respected, largely because of his royal blood. I was unaware of that, though, and thought the great homage paid to him was because of his position, and that anyone who got to such a position would be treated likewise. Secondly, because through my long years in school I had come across many kinds of teachers and I felt that I could join the competition and be a good one....

At the end of the two-year course I made up my mind to come to Rotuma first thing, and at the end of 1947 I was appointed to the Malhaha school. I stayed at the Malhaha school, teaching Class 6 most of the time, until 1953 when I was temporarily transferred to the Motusa school. Towards the end of 1953 I returned to the Malhaha school—the new one which had just been built. I taught Class 6 until the end of 1954, when I took over Class 7. At the end of 1955 I was awarded the Rotuma Development Fund Scholarship to take teacher’s training in New Zealand. After completing ... two years in New Zealand, I returned to Fiji. That was in 1957. In 1958 I taught Form III in a school for Fijian boys in Lodoni, Fiji. In 1959 I returned to Rotuma and have taught at the Malhaha school—Form IV, since then.
Man in his 30s: After getting my teacher’s certificate, I was appointed to Queen Victoria School as an assistant master. That was a good opportunity for me because I worked with people who were experts in their various fields. I learned quite a bit there from the masters themselves. I taught three years there and after that I went to a training college in New Zealand; it was a two-year course.…

I had about five months of student teaching, not all at one stretch. I taught European children, and sometimes the children would tell me that their mother wanted me to come for tea, but they usually lived too far. European children are not shy. Even if you’re new to a class, if you ask them to tell stories there will be many hands up. In my opinion it was harder. First of all, they’re so active. You have to keep moving all the time. Rotuman children are not so very active. They’re very passive.

I left New Zealand in 1957 and went to Suva, where I was appointed to Rotuma. I arrived in Rotuma towards the end of February 1958. That was when they first started the secondary department at the Malhaha school. I was appointed to teach Form III.

Man in his 20s: [It] was the year they had the big hurricane in Suva so I didn’t get a boat back to Fiji until April. The vacation in Rotuma cost me plenty. I didn’t get back to school until the first term was almost over and I was quite a bit behind. The principal told me to stay for the two-week vacation, but that didn’t help much. I’d say that that holiday in Rotuma caused me to fail my last exam—the University Entrance. At the end of the year I was a bit too old to go back to school so I went to work at the Government buildings. I got a job as a clerk in the Registrar General’s office. I stayed with this job for one year, and during that year the inspector of schools asked me if I would like to try teaching. My job as a clerk was easy-going, but there wasn’t much advantage to it. I wanted to do something that would be useful for the people in Rotuma. The inspector of schools asked me if I would like to take a bursary (scholarship) to New Zealand to study education and come back to become a teacher. I looked upon that as one of the best chances I would ever get. I liked the idea of becoming a teacher. In fact I had applied for Nasinu Training College before, but I backed out of it because my sister was already going there. Being older than her, I felt that maybe I wouldn’t get on well with her; I felt that I might
lose my feeling of priority over her if we came back on an equal basis.

I went to New Zealand early in 1954…. I stayed in New Zealand until the middle of 1956. I got out of college at the end of 1955, but spent the last six months roaming around New Zealand, taking different jobs. My first job was on a sheep farm. I worked for a building contractor, on a wharf, in the freezing works, and as a delivery boy. I enjoyed that period very much. I saw a lot of people and a lot of places. I spent most of my other holidays visiting with people who had invited me to their homes.…

I came back to Suva and the education inspector had a good go at me for spending a six-month holiday without permission. They told me they paid my fare back only because I had a good record at the college, otherwise they wouldn’t have. They told me that I would start teaching at the same salary I earned as a clerk, and I told them I wouldn’t teach on that salary, so they ended up by offering me about one-and-a half times my old salary and I accepted. I started off at the Brother’s School in Suva. It’s a Catholic school attended by all denominations. I started off with a class of seventy-five. That’s a hell of a big class for the first time of teaching. I found it pretty hard, partly because it was my first time and partly because there was such a mixture of people—Indians, Fijians, half-castes, Samoans, Rotumans—everything. I taught in both English and Fijian. Then, at the end of 1956 I was assigned to be headmaster of the Motusa school, where I now am.

Nurses

Woman in her 20s: When I reached the end of my third year of training, I sat for my last exam and was one of the six who made it through. I was so glad that I took a trip to Rotuma to tell my parents about my happiness and returned to Fiji on the same boat. After that I worked in the hospital, but my intentions were to work for my native land and my people, and then one day my dreams came true. I was called to go and work for my people in Rotuma. Gee! How my heart beat with joy when I was on my way to my native land. This is very hard work, of course, but since I love it, I look upon everything as easy.…

Now I am working in the hospital in my native land and I enjoy working for my people. I try to treat them all the same, and I often relieve the doctor with cases that I know how to handle. I learned how to drive and whenever the doctor is too busy to go
around the island visiting the sick I take the ambulance and see the sick people instead of him.

*Woman, age unknown:* After four years of hard studies I became a staff nurse and yet still worked with my friends in the hospital. I was thinking of going home to work for my own people and one day my dreams came true. I left Suva for my homeland and came to the hospital in Ahau. There were about six of us taking care of the sick in the hospital and visiting the sick in their homes around the island....

After two years in the hospital I was sent to look after two districts. I lived in my own home and visited homes in the two districts and gave the people whatever they needed and treated their sores....

I always go with my husband whenever there is a call during the night. He helps me sometimes in my work.... I am doing my best to help them and attend to the sick when I am called for.... It's nice to think that I am working for my own people at home.

*Clergy*

*Methodist minister in his 50s:* After my four years in Davuilevu, in 1931, I was sent to Rotuma to teach at the Motusa school. Rotuma didn’t seem like it had changed much. The only thing that seemed hard was the school. I was in charge of 140 children, ranging from Class 1 to Class 5. After two years, I was sent to the Paptea school. I stayed in the Paptea school for two years, and then in 1935 I decided to go back to Davuilevu as a theological student to study for the ministry....

After studying for two years in Davuilevu, I was sent by the Church to Australia to do deputation work—encourage people in Australia to donate to the overseas mission....

I stayed in Australia almost nine months. During that time I travelled a lot and sometimes stayed in two different homes in one week. Most of the time I spent visiting peoples’ homes. I also visited schools and churches and preached on Sundays. After nine months in a strange country, I was happy to come back to Fiji again. When I returned they sent me to Rotuma and I was put in charge of the Noa’tau circuit. I liked being a minister. I felt like I was helping the people. I spent two years as a minister in Noa’tau, and then I answered a church advertisement for a native minister to work among the half-castes in Northern Australia. The Church accepted
and I was appointed there in 1940. I spent five years in Northern Australia and a year in Sydney. I only spent one year with the half-castes; after that they evacuated the half-castes and our women and children south, because of the war. My wife and children were sent to Sydney and I transferred to native work—working with the Aborigines. It was very hard—the language was difficult. It wasn’t so much religious work that I did among them; it was mostly agricultural work. Every morning we took them to the field, planting sweet potatoes.

I finally got back to Fiji in early 1947, and the Church appointed me as superintendent of the Rotuma circuit. I stayed as superintendent until last year, 1959. I retired because the church wanted me to go to Fiji, but my wife was not in good enough health to go about and I thought it would be better to retire from the work rather than take her away from Rotuma. Now I am a supernumerary minister and I’m assisting as a teacher in the Malhaha school. I am not a registered teacher now, but because of the shortage of teachers, the D.O. and school committee appointed me to help out. It’s been a long while, and the method of teaching has changed, so it’s a bit difficult, but I like it.

*Catholic priest in his 30s*: If you asked me now, if you had it to do over again, would you become a priest, I’d have to think about it. It doesn’t mean I regret it, but I’d have to think. The life and obligations are not easy. You’re not your own boss. I was anxious though to come back to Rotuma and work among my own people.

After I was ordained I spent three months in pastoral work in New Zealand. After that I was appointed for six weeks in North Auckland as an assistant priest and after that I was sent back to Fiji. First I was appointed as assistant priest at Levuka, for about two-and-a-half months and then I was sent to Rotuma. I felt great about being sent to Rotuma. I have no desire to be posted anywhere else but here....

As a priest you can’t be perfectly happy, but when you come back from talking to people as a priest, you feel good because you’ve done something worthwhile. One shouldn’t be surprised if he isn’t perfectly happy, because God doesn’t intend you to be perfectly happy in this life.

*Catholic brother in his 20s*: After I finished with the noviciate I was sent to the New Hebrides to be a mechanic. The American brother
at Port Villa taught me to be a mechanic. I stayed there for three years. I enjoyed this time very much. I liked the work, it was very interesting. I learned to fix cars and all kinds of mechanical things. When I left there I was 25 years old and trained as a mechanic.

After that I had a six months’ holiday and I went back to Fiji, and then I came back to Rotuma. I almost couldn’t speak the language; I had to learn it all over again. That was last year, and now I’m staying here at Sumi. I like it very much. There’s plenty of work. I think I’d like to stay here.

Notes on Chapter 18

1 The extract concerning Rotuma from the log of the ship *Emerald* for June 1834 by its captain, John Eagleston, is available in Pacific Manuscript Bureau frame 151 and also online via the Rotuma Website at http://www.rotuma.net/os/Eagleston.htm [accessed 27 May 2020].

2 For more on attitudes toward work as expressed in Rotuman sayings, see also “Rotuman Culture as Reflected in Its Sayings,” by Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, in *Fāeag ʻes Fūaga*, pages 220–223.
Chapter 19

Leadership

Leadership in Rotuma in 1960 was divided into two forms: traditional chieftainship roles (gagaj ēs itu 'u [district chiefs] and fa ēs ho'aga [subchiefs within districts]) and Western institutional roles (teachers, bureaucrats, priests and ministers, medical personnel, businessmen, etc.). The experiences of leaders in these positions tended to be quite different.

Chieftainship

Chiefs are central to social life on Rotuma. They are customarily chosen from among the bilineal descendants of ancestors who held a title (as togi). At all kinds of ceremonies, chiefs (gagaja) have special rights and responsibilities. They are honoured and eat from tables (ʻumefe) that symbolize their status. In return they are expected to give speeches on behalf of their constituents and to be generous when presentations of food and valuables are required.

Each of Rotuma’s seven district has a head chief (gagaj ēs itu 'u) and a number of subchiefs (fa ēs ho'aga) who are in charge of clusters of households that served as work groups at communal events.

While expected to show some degree of forceful leadership, Rotuman chiefs are constrained by an ethic of reciprocity in which the people provide labour and material support, while chiefs ensure their people’s welfare through displays of generosity. Rotuman myths clearly portray chiefs who were too demanding—who took more than they gave—as the conceptual equivalent of cannibals. The behaviour of Rotumans toward their chiefs over time is consistent with this mythical
Rotuman Life Experiences, 1890–1960

charter, continually demonstrating both passive and active resistance to chiefly excess.

But quite apart from the men who occupy them, chiefly titles represent the heart and soul of Rotuman culture. When Rotumans talk about past glories, about the supernaturally charged powers of their legendary ancestors, they almost invariably refer to former chiefs. By representing these titled ancestors in name, modern chiefs encode the dignity of tradition in the roles they play, whether or not their actions conform to expectations. Without chiefs, ceremonies of all kinds—births, marriages, welcomings, village and district fetes, etc.—would lose their significance, for it is the presence of chiefs that lends dignity and historical depth to such occasions.

Many Rotuman sayings, including several in Elizabeth Inia’s 1998 collection Fäeag 'es Fuaga, reflect the high regard that Rotumans have for the institution of chieftainship, regardless of their attitudes toward particular title-holders. Thus a newly installed chief is referred to as a sau pene'iisi (sweet-smelling flower), the same phrase used as a metaphor for one’s sweetheart. In this instance, it is a metonym for a new chief because, on the day of his installation, he wears a flower behind his right ear. (A metonym is a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole.) During that day he is the special “flower” of the kainaga (family group) that installs him. To pick a coconut from a coconut tree is a metonym for an installation ceremony; this saying refers to the piles of coconut husks that accumulate under coconut trees The newly installed district chief is said to cover them up with fresh green leaves, a symbolic allusion to the expectation that he will solve the standing problems in the district, such as land disputes.
The chief’s wife also plays a very important role in community activities, especially related to the other women. She can elevate—or undermine—her husband’s status by her actions and attitudes. When an otherwise well-regarded chief has a wife who creates problems in a village or district, Rotumans may say, “The canoe is good but the outrigger is bad” (311). If friction arises for any reason between the new chief and his people, as with a couple, the saying “the joint creaks” may be invoked.

Once installed, chiefs are addressed honorifically as “you red ones” in reference to the red sashes once worn by the sau and mua, the two highest-ranking officers in the traditional hierarchy. If a chief fails to live up to expectations or fails to act authoritatively, people remark that “his sash is not red,” implying that he lacks mana (potency).

Chiefs are honoured in various ways, at least two of which are encoded in Rotuman sayings. One is the custom of tukuag ‘omoe, wherein the men from each district take an annual gift of baskets of cooked food to their district chief. The chief blesses the food when he receives it, helping to ensure fruitfulness for the coming year. The other custom is for the men of a district to give the chief a massive ceremonial gift of taro corms, in quantities of 1,000 or multiples thereof, “to swing on his food hook.” This is a way of symbolizing the prosperity of land and ensuring future blessings. Chiefs are also honoured with a special language of respect, one phrase of which—‘O ma ‘o kalog (Yes, sir)—is used to warn children to mind their manners when interacting too casually with a chief. In general, people are advised not to become too familiar with chiefs, lest they act disrespectfully toward them.

That chiefs are not always easy to please is signalled by the saying “to hunt banded rail with the chief,” the message being that there is no way to win; if you catch a banded rail (ve’a) the chief will be jealous, but if
you don’t catch it he will be angry. Unlike Fijian chiefs (who are raised from birth to fill that role), Rotumans are already adults when they are selected by their kin group to serve. Chieftainship can therefore be burdensome and a source of ambivalent feelings, as revealed in the reflections of title-holders who shared their life stories in 1960:

*Subchief in his 50s:* I became a *fa ‘es ho’aga* [head of a section of a district], but I don’t like it, because I know now that a leader must be a kind man, so that the people will like him. It would be easier for a rich man, so he could buy the things his people needs. Sometimes, like during a feast when I am served the best foods and treated with such concern, I remember my mother and father and the way they used to treat me. It was the same kind of thing. When I think of that I feel pained inside.

*Subchief in his 30s:* It happened one day that I was chosen by our relations to take the subchief’s title. I knew I was too young and not wise enough to lead many people, but I had to take it. Many a time my elders were wild with me but I didn’t care because they had chosen me to look after them. I was brave and very insolent to them and they seemed to hate me later.

A few years passed when a great suffering came upon me. One of my five children died a sudden death. He seemed to be poisoned by something. How sad I was to think of it, but it dawned on me that maybe it was a punishment given me for how I had treated the older people in our village. I changed myself then and became a new person towards my people and now my wife and I are loved by our neighbours and are leading a happier life among the others in the village.

*Subchief in his 30s:* I don’t want to be a *fa ‘es ho’aga*, but I do it because I love my mother. This *ho’aga* came from her side and by taking it I’ll always be able to remember her, even after she has died.

*Newly elected district chief in his 30s:* Now I’m chief of a district and it’s the first time in my life I feel really bad. Being a chief is hard and I’m very unhappy. The night that I found out I was the new chief,
four days from then I could still not remember and think about what I was doing—just like I had no brain.

One day I went to the bush to weed my garden and left my knife stuck in a tree. I didn’t feel like working so I just prepared my food and when I finished I couldn’t remember where my knife was.

Now I’ve been chief for three weeks and still have trouble thinking and I worry too much. It’s better to live like I did before than to be chief. If you’re a good chief the people will all like you, but if you are a bad chief they will hate you. I’m worried about whether I’ll be a good chief or not; a worried life is no good.

Amidst their other reflections, some chiefs explicitly acknowledged the essential role played by their wives (or their sisters) and the importance of good relations between them and the people:

Former district chief in his 60s: I was … chosen to take over a whole district and the people all gave their agreement and I ruled over them. Older people were like children sometimes; they were so naughty that I had to speak to them like children. I made them do my work, like cutting copra or anything I would like them to do for me….

My wife did her very best and the women in the district all loved her and whatever she would call for, they were ready to help. But for my part, whenever I called my men to do my work, only a few came out of more than a hundred who belonged to my district. My people built me a house and cut copra for me and yet they were not satisfied with what I had done for them. One day I got a letter from the government that I had to leave my position to another man. I felt so sorry because whenever I wanted hard work done for me they would come and finish it in a short while, but now I would have to do the work on my own. I can remember that many people were very glad when I was told to leave off ruling them.

District chief in his 60s: To my surprise, I was elected chief, but how should I lead my people? I felt so strange and nervous to sit in front of so many people, old and young and children. How was I to speak to them? I knew that being the chief I was their servant at the same time. I took my place and my wife, being a nice woman,
seemingly was liked by everybody. At the beginning my father was helping me how I should act to make the people like me.

Unluckily, my dear father died two years after my election, leaving me alone to lead my people. My poor wife was then taken seriously ill and died…. For a whole year I was leading the people alone with my sister taking my wife’s place.

I then got married again … and how different I found the people that time. People seemed to hate my new wife and began to disobey my words … although many times people told me she is not the chief, but she is my wife and she may have something to say, too. I noticed that people really hated me because of my wife. Many of them grumble and say that they should have someone new in my place because I wasn’t doing the right thing sometimes, but none of them had the courage to let it be known in a district meeting. Sometimes I knew I was doing wrong because my wife liked to be that way, but we two were on the same side. My wife sometimes made my people hate me but I didn’t care about them, I cared about my wife who would take care of me.

I’m still a chief in our district and looking after my people, many of whom like me while many hate me because I am getting old and now not well fitted for this kind of work.

Similarly, a chief’s wife in her 30s felt the burden of the roles they had to play:

When my husband became chief I felt very bad—right up until now. I’m afraid, because I know I have to be kind to the people all the time and have to lead the women in the right way. I always worry about what I should do to lead the people in the right way and make them happy. This is the first time in my life that I’ve always had to worry about what I’m going to do and whether my husband and I will be able to do the right things. I feel anxious because we are poor people and it will be very hard for my husband and I to get the things that the people will need to make them happy. If the people like you they will do what you say, but if they are angry at you they won’t want to do what you want them to. This is the first time in my life that I am really worried and live unhappily, because my husband has become a chief and we are poor people. It’s better for a rich man to be chief.
Some men held both chiefly and nontraditional leadership positions, for instance as overseers or chairmen with the local cooperative society or one of the commercial firms that were then operating on the island. They reflected on the similarities and differences between these roles:

*Subchief in his 50s:* One of my relations who had a chiefly title died in another district and I was called to take the title. I left my home and went with my wife and all our children and moved to that district to take the *as togi* [chieftainship]. I was leading a *hoʻaga* there. At first people loved us and they seemed to help us in everything we told them to do, but later my wife seemed to be harsh with them and the people hated us, up until now.

I was chosen to be the overseer in the plantations for the district cooperative society. After two years I got tired of the people and left my work and chose someone else to take my place,…

Now I am the chairman of the cooperative society. It is so hard to speak to the older people, but because I was chosen I am trying my very best so that the people of the society would not hate me like those people from *hoʻaga* who still hate my wife. Eventually I will leave this place, the people, and the chiefly title and go to Fiji using my own name, because I have already seen that being a leader here I’m a servant of the people. I think it is much better to stay without an *as togi* than to be a servant. Older people are very hard to lead.

*Subchief in his 30s:* I lived with my second wife in a house that was given to me by B.P.’s [Burns Philp], because I had the job of overseer. After I was made the overseer I found it hard at first, but I discovered that if you are a kind person and know your job well, it isn’t too difficult. I stayed at B.P.’s until 1953 when I stopped working for B.P.’s and moved to my wife’s home to become the *faʻufisi* [second-ranking chief] of the district and also a *faʻes hoaga*. Later on I was made the chairman of the local co-op. Being a leader for all these things was different than when I was free because I had to think all the time about the welfare of the people. But I found it hard only in the beginning, and when I got used to it, it wasn’t too bad because I knew what to do and my only problem was telling the people to do it. Now I am living together with my wife and will do whatever the district chief says.
Nontraditional Forms of Leadership

Nontraditional forms of leadership involve a different set of skills and qualifications, mostly acquired through education and particular work experiences. Whereas chiefs require, at least in theory, an appropriate pedigree to qualify for a leadership position, nontraditional leaders do not. Anyone who has acquired the necessary credentials through personal effort can qualify for leadership within their fields of expertise.

Furthermore, especially with regard to issues involving knowledge of modern society such as commerce, government, or medicine, their voices may be given special weight, even outside of their special areas. Below are extracts from life stories and interviews about leadership from four categories of nontraditional leaders: those involved in governance within the Rotuma Council, religious leaders, a business leader, and educators.

Government Positions of Authority (Rotuma Council)

In 1960, the Rotuma Council consisted of the head chiefs (gagaj is itu'u) of Rotuma’s seven districts; an elected representative from each district; the District Officer, who acted as chairman; and the assistant medical officer. District representatives (mata) were elected by secret ballot at two-year intervals. The Council met quarterly and discussed all matters pertaining to the administration of the island and it was responsible for making regulations that had the force of law.

District representative in his 30s: I was first elected to the Council of Chiefs last year. That was when the first representatives were elected. I thought I might do good in the Council so I had a friend nominate me, so he wrote a letter of nomination, and found a man to second it, and they sent the letter to the District Officer. Mine was the only genuine nomination. There were a couple of others,
but the people had signed the others’ names—Rotuman style—and as a consequence I was automatically elected. When I first attended a Council meeting I was rather awed by it and thought it might prove to be beyond me. Later on I found I was able to hold my own. I was one of the few educated people on the Council, and I found the outlook of the majority quite narrow. One thing I found in the Council is you have to take things very easy. Radical changes, even though they may be good ones, won’t be followed by the people. Take the Land Commission, for example.

The idea was to register and survey the lands. That’s where the old ideas and the modern ideas clashed. The modern idea was to register people in only one or two kainaga, but the old idea was having your rights intact in all your kainaga. The people couldn’t see that registration in one or two kainaga did not necessarily interfere with your rights in the other kainaga. If the people had a bit more education they would have been able to read the bill without it being interpreted. Even many of the Council members couldn’t read the bill and it had to be translated into Rotuman. If the Council members couldn’t understand the bill, how could the poor people in the villages understand it?

*District representative in his 20s:* In 1958 I was elected to the Rotuma Council of Chiefs as a district representative. My impression of Council meetings was that the District Officer had the say most of the time. The chiefs more or less followed whatever the D.O. suggested. That is probably because when there were European D.O.s the chiefs were in awe of them, and this attitude has continued towards the Rotuman D.O.s. At the beginning, the say of the representatives was very limited. Wilson Inia, for instance, was dismissed because of a difference with the D.O. I think the initial idea was for the Council representatives to be advisors, but that has gradually changed. Now I would say that the representatives have about equal rights as the chiefs. Now the representatives do most of the talking. We can usually persuade the chiefs to come around to our point of view. Some of the chiefs are quite conservative. One of the chiefs always looks at things from the religious point of view; one of the Council representatives is that way, too. On the whole, I think the Council functions pretty well. Sometimes the chiefs are a little slow to express themselves,
but as a body I think it represents the opinion of the people pretty well….

Being a Council representative you have a duty to the people. Sometimes it’s very disappointing being a representative. Take the Land Commission. That was approved by the Council. We went back to the villages and explained it and the people agreed, and everything was set. Then afterwards they changed their minds. One thing that disrupted things was the outside influence from Fiji, and also some of the people on the island. Some people were only thinking of their own interests.

Religious Leaders

In 1960, all Rotumans on the island identified as either Methodist or Catholic. The Methodist Church was led by a Rotuman head minister who supervised other ministers on the island as well as lay preachers. The Catholic Church was divided into two parishes, Sumi and Upu, each headed by a European Marist priest. In addition at that time, one Rotuman was serving as a Catholic priest on the island and one Rotuman was a Catholic brother. Here are the thoughts that two of those religious leaders shared about their roles and how they fit into Rotuman society:

*Methodist minister in his 50s:* A good minister should be a friend to all. He should be a man who knows his Bible well. If he knows his Bible well, he’ll know what to do with it. Some people don’t care about their people—they’re only interested in their service, but not in helping the people—like if they are having difficulties, such as sickness.

*Catholic priest in his 30s:* As a priest you can’t be perfectly happy, but when you come back from talking to people as a priest, you feel good because you’ve done something worthwhile. One shouldn’t be surprised if he isn’t perfectly happy, because God doesn’t intend you to be perfectly happy in this life.

In Rotuma we have two denominations, and in order to be successful you should treat them both equally. If the Wesleyans see
that the priest is kind to them, they may feel more sympathetic to the Catholic church.

I also think the priest should be respectful to the chiefs. I think the French fathers were wrong in the way they treated the chiefs. After all, the people look up to the chiefs and if you want to get their cooperation, it’s better if the chiefs are favourably disposed towards you. Otherwise they just try to stay away.

I think a man goes on learning until he dies. I’ve done some things seriously wrong—about Rotuman custom—since I’ve returned to Rotuma. Like one time when I was riding on my bicycle past a *mamasa* [welcoming ceremony]. I went right past without slowing down. I felt very bad about that. It’s respectful to at least slow down, if not get off your bicycle and walk until you are past. That shows that you feel something about what’s happening, not like it doesn’t mean anything to you. The worst thing was that they stopped me near the end of the road and asked me to join them and eat; I really felt ashamed. In New Zealand they might say that is silly, but in Rotuma it’s the accepted thing and I think it’s proper to follow the custom. I wouldn’t do anything like that again. I think that some of the Rotumans who get educated ignore the proper customs of etiquette and I think the old Rotuman customs should be kept.

A good priest should mix with the people, not stay aloof. The people are a bit scared of priests, they like the priest to make the first move.

*Business Leaders*

In 1960 there were two firms on the island, Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, each headed by a businessman from Fiji. A Rotuman man in his 20s was an assistant manager at Morris Hedstrom; he saw several attributes as important to succeeding in that role:

The first thing is you must be honest, because you’re handling cash. You must always try to be good-natured and humble, because you don’t know how touchy people are, and if you’re cheeky and throw your weight around people won’t want to come into your store. You must be competent to do your office work.
Educators

Headmasters of the schools were responsible for implementing curricula prescribed by the colonial government in Fiji and were expected to have leadership abilities vis-à-vis their faculty and staff. Other instructors, particularly those responsible for teaching the more advanced classes, were often looked to for advice both within the school system and in their home districts. They all had years of experience in Fiji or other countries while undergoing teacher preparation if not also working in other schools, and they reflected on what it meant to return to Rotuma to live and teach:

Teacher in his 30s: I’m quite happy as a teacher. But I feel that to become a teacher in Rotuma places additional burdens on a person. In Rotuma, people expect too much from a teacher with regard to his personal life. People expect you to be a moral leader as well, and if you don’t work up to their expectations, they have a disregard for you. At the moment I don’t take too much notice of what they say, on the assumption that I have a private life to lead. But I think the longer I stay in Rotuma, the more I’ll be influenced by Rotuman attitudes towards life and will tend to fall back towards Rotuman ways.

I hope to be able to leave Rotuma in order to advance in my profession. In Rotuma there’s not much chance for advancement. My opinion is that the time to return to Rotuma is after you’ve reached your peak in your profession. I want to remain a teacher as long as I can. I want to reach the highest possible place I can get to.

I feel that a good teacher should have the chance to pass on his knowledge—his secrets—to other teachers. This remains hard when one is simply a teacher in a school. I would like to be a visiting teacher—a teacher who visits schools to inspect and advise on teaching methods.

I think a good teacher is one who can easily entice his children to learn and understand through his methods of imparting knowledge, depending on the methods he uses … inventing methods, for instance, and who can readily help his children to grow mentally and emotionally….
As a teacher I feel that a large part of our job is to encourage the children under our care to become independent thinking people who do not readily have to conform to any influences, except after careful thinking and consideration. This may help them to cope with their changing environment.

*Teacher in his 20s:* At the end of 1956 [after living and teaching abroad], I was assigned to be headmaster of the Motusa school, where I now am. At first the Rotuman children seemed very strange to me. The Rotuman children don’t act as European children do. Their interests are different. For one thing, their experiences are very narrow, and their sense of leadership is not as keen. I've tried two ways of inducing leadership. The first two years I tried to induce individual students to take responsibility for the class at times when I was gone. It didn’t work out very well. The individuals who were chosen didn’t know how to control the class, and the other children didn’t want to follow what the leader would say. Since the end of last year I’ve tried a new experiment—appointing class leaders for a term. It works quite well with some, but not so well with others. At first favouritism was a bit of a problem, but I threatened to punish the leaders if they showed favouritism. I tried to point out to them that when you are a leader you must regard everyone as an equal, regardless of who are your friends. Now I think it’s working quite well.

*Views of Leadership*

For people who were in leadership positions, I included a question in the life story questionnaire regarding what it takes to be a good leader in Rotuma. Here is a selection of the responses, some of which hold up as a model Wilson Inia, who by that time had served in several leadership roles with the Rotuma Council, the Rotuma Cooperative Association, and Rotuma High School.²

*Subchief in his 50s:* A leader should be a kind man, a rich man, and he should have good schooling.
Subchief in his 30s: A good leader must be a kind man to the people and he should know how to do the work that is required of him.

Subchief in his 30s: I think a leader should be a good man, like Wilson Inia and also rich. If a leader is a [poor] man like me, he will have to worry every day.

Subchief in his 30s: A leader should be a skilful person who can lead his people to follow the right way. He also should be rich, and he should not be a sulky person.

New district chief in his 30s: A good leader should be a man like Master Inia—somebody with plenty of education; or a rich person, so he can help the people in his district. Just like [a chief in another district]. The people all like him because he always gives money for things that they need.

Clerk to the District Officer in his 30s: I think [a good leader] ought to be a fellow who knows how to get along in the modern world. The good chiefs in the old days just aren’t capable any more because things are changing too fast. I think it’s better for a fellow with some education to become chief rather than just someone from the right mosega [chiefly family]. If he is from a chiefly family that would be very nice.

Teacher and district representative in his 30s: You must be fair, first of all, in whatever you do. Once you are shown to be unfair, then your prestige goes way down. The people are very critical of unfairness. Also, I think one should take things easy, by which I mean that there is no need to rush decisions. For example, even when a chief has the right to make a decision, it is wiser for him to ask the opinions of his subchiefs, or even the people, before coming to a decision. If possible, a leader should have reached a certain standard of education, even if it’s not Western education. If a chief was thoroughly grounded in Rotuman customs that wouldn’t be so bad because he’d know something, but if he knows neither Rotuman customs nor has had a Western education, then God help the people. In Rotuma particularly, a leader must be a Christian, or a church-goer. The people will have more respect if he goes to church even if he doesn’t believe in God. Another quality, I think, every leader should have a goal. That’s a Rotuman
custom. For example, in the old days a chief might ask himself, “What can I do so the people will remember me?” and he might make some thing like a kiʻu [ten thousand; reference is to a ceremony in which a chief is presented with thousands of root crops as an expression of homage]. Now a chief, like the present chief of our district, can have goals like improving the living conditions in the district. We have established a district fund from which we’ve built concrete tanks for each family, and now the fund has been switched over to build houses. I think that a leader in Rotuma must make an effort to see the other man’s point of view, especially since the rules of debate don’t exist. By that I mean he shouldn’t judge people by his own standards.

He should refrain from passing unfounded judgements. A chief should also be firm. Once a decision is made, he should stick to it and not be easily persuaded. In that way the people will continue to respect him. I also think it’s a good thing in Rotuma for a leader to know what other leaders are doing in their villages, and to have an open mind about these things. On the other hand, there is no need to simply imitate for the sake of competing if there is no good reason to do so. This is done too much in Rotuma—for example the kiʻu. A leader should make a conscious effort to keep his standard of living as high as he can, so that if the occasion ever arises, you can be able to help the people you lead.

Teacher and district representative in his 20s: A leader in Rotuma should be very firm. [One district has problems] because the chief is easily persuaded to change his mind. If you’re not firm in Rotuma the people will overrule you. For another thing, you must be fair. For example, some chiefs show favouritism towards friends and relations with regard to weddings, with regard to the custom of laʻa [organised gift giving], for instance. He should be respectable—be a good example to the people. He should be a good worker in the bush, for instance, and keep his house in good condition. He should be considerate of others in handling their things and property.

Perceptions of Change

Leaders were also asked about the greatest Western influences on Rotuma during their lifetimes. Acknowledging that Rotumans were following
European ways and using European material goods, several of them reflected on what they saw as plusses and minuses of these influences:

Methodist minister in his 50s: There are some good things and some bad things. Conditions of living are much better. We’re learning from the Europeans a better way of living. Also education and the church. The bad things they brought over here include strong drinks (liquor).

Clerk to the District Officer in his 30s: Medically the influence of European society has been good. Education has improved. I really can’t see anything bad. I think Rotuma’s biggest problem is leadership. The leaders just aren’t trained for dealing with the problems of the modern world. That’s why I think we should choose chiefs with education.

Catholic priest in his 30s: To me [the people have] lost their natural kindness. I notice this especially in the business people. Before they were a very simple people but when they get mixed up with business they get restless, it doesn’t seem as though they’re as happy as they were before. The people are not docile, they’re not willing to learn. Maybe it’s because they’ve been to Fiji. I notice that particularly with those fellows who have been on the boat. They’re the worst of the Rotumans. They’re no good in the bush, for instance. European influence has been good in some ways. Take Master Inia, for example; he’s a perfect gentleman.

Teacher in his 30s: The coming of the Europeans has gradually made a marked difference between the old and the young generations. The older generations are holding fast to customs and culture, very reluctant to depart from them. And the younger generation’s lives are sped up by modern influences. They are eager to disregard the old and adopt the new. In my opinion there is sort of a conflict between the two. Then comes the question, who is going to win? As an answer to that I feel that the younger generation is always aware of the older customs and will never strongly oppose the beliefs and attitudes of the older generation. The people who belong to the younger generation gradually give way to the older folks. The only way a person can really stay progressive is to leave Rotuma. That is something that shouldn’t happen. These old
people should give in to the younger one in some ways. An example is the religious attitudes of the old folks. They cling to this notion that you shouldn’t play sports on Sunday, or that you shouldn’t go to dances. They tend to look down on us if we do these things. If they asked us, we would have something to say, and what we have to say would have been largely influenced by modern society.

_District chief in his 30s:_ The Europeans came to Rotuma and they brought their food and it made the people sick; some of the food like candies are too sweet, and some of the foods are too soft. It makes the teeth all fall out. In the old days the people all had good teeth and they were very strong. The European foods have made the people very weak. Also the people have left the Rotuman ways and are following the European ways. The young boys haven’t learned to be a _mafua_ [ceremonial announcer], or to call a _fakpeche_ [ceremonial chant]. Before the people didn’t know how to steal from a business, but now they’ve learned ways to steal.

_Teacher and district representative in his 30s:_ One big influence has been the increased desire for material things like bread and rice, for instance. I think the chief reason is that these things are easier to prepare. Another reason is that most of the Rotumans have been to Fiji and have become accustomed to these things. Money has made it easier for people to store money. Before, _apei_ [fine mats] were used, but they disintegrate. And of course _apei_ can’t be used to buy manufactured goods.

The great desire now is to have a good education so that they can get a good job, and of course money is the ultimate aim. In the old days the chiefs tended to accumulate wealth (mats and food) because he got a share in everything. Respect was tied up with wealth, and a wealthy chief would be more respected than a poor one. Even a wealthy person would have more influence than a poor chief. That would be because the people could expect to get more from him. This orientation is the motive for gaining wealth.

There are two ways of gaining prestige. One is to marry into a chiefly family, and the other is to accumulate wealth. The chiefly families used to keep apart in order to preserve their chiefly rights, although there are several families that still have that attitude, especially the mothers. Then there are, of course, the schools and
the church, but the biggest influence is money. Then there are the
dances, sports and things like that.

Teacher and district representative in his 20s: I think to a certain extent
the European influence has done Rotuma a lot of good socially, as
far as sports is concerned, for example. One thing that has been
spoiled is the relationship between kainaga [kin]. Nowadays people
think mainly in terms of wealth. If a man is rich, he will have
plenty of friends and kainaga.

MH assistant manager in his 20s: [European influence] has done a lot
of good and a lot of bad. To an educated person you could see
some progress—education, for example. Some of the old people
probably resent it. They feel that when a child gets educated he
tries to throw his weight around and ignore old customs. The
standard of living is better. One bad part is the films. Youngsters
are exposed to gangster films. They come to think that a man
should be respected only because of his strength. They overlook the
intellectual part. They think to act a gentleman is to be a sissy.

Catholic brother in his 20s: Rotuma has become more civilised. The
way they build their houses, and the clothing, I suppose the
manners, too. More friendly I suppose.

Desirable Changes

Finally, leaders were asked what changes they would like to see in future:

Subchief in his 50s: If it was up to me, Rotumans would not follow
the rules of the Europeans, but would go back to the Rotuman
customs instead, and act like our parents used to act in the old
days. There were so many rules and we didn’t have to worry about
so many things. It would be better if we could follow the Rotuman
way.

Methodist minister in his 50s: What I would like to do is teach them to
live happily and to use their own belongings properly. Instead of
spending their money on things that are useless, they would spend
their money on things like getting a good education for their
children and building decent homes, instead of wasting their
money and time—things like kato’aga, etc. For example, they run
short of water, but they don’t know enough to spend money on building proper tanks.

*Catholic brother in his 20s:* To build [Rotuma] up … fix up the roads … tanks for water, things like that.

*Clerk to the District Officer in his 30s:* I would like to do something that would please each individual—improve the standard of living, for example. That covers a lot.

*Catholic priest in his 30s:* That the people can live a good material life. The trouble with Rotuma is the water supply, we need better housing. This thing they’re doing now—inspections—that’s very important. I would like to see Rotumans going for doctors, we need doctors. This is a personal opinion. I think it’s good to see the businesses being run by Rotumans, like the co-ops. I mean if they can do it.

*Subchief in his 30s:* If it was up to me, we would leave the Rotuman way and follow the European ideas. If we did that we would be happy and rich, because the way things are now if you get money you have to spend it on things that are of no use, like *katoʻaga*, weddings and things like that. If we followed the European way we would only spend money for our own families.

*District chief in his 30s:* If it was up to me, there are only two ways—to follow the Rotuman ways or the European ways. I would want the people to follow the European ways. If we follow the European ways, we wouldn’t make things like *hapagsū* [ceremony for someone recovering from a bad experience], weddings, and things like that where everyone comes whether they’re invited or not. The Rotuman way costs too much money—sometimes they kill seven cows at a wedding. Also, at a Rotuman wedding the bride and groom have to give back all the *apei* [fine mats] and mats. At a European wedding, they keep all their presents. That’s the right way I think.

*Teacher and district representative in his 30s:* I think the best thing for Rotuma would be to raise the general standard of education—not just for a few people. I wouldn’t have a few very well educated ones with the mass of them down below. I’d rather have the mass of
them to a minimum level of, say, Form III or Form IV. Then an economic goal. I think the best thing for Rotuma would be to find another commercial crop.

Teacher and district representative in his 20s: For one thing, I’d try to improve education and sanitation, especially getting rid of the flies and mosquitoes. I’d put better roads through the bush. Another thing I’d like to do is to introduce more money crops to the Rotumans—coffee and cocoa would grow quite well in Rotuma. It’s only a financial problem to get started. Also improving the banana trade. And also I would like to improve the water supply.

MH assistant manager in his 20s: I’d try to give them as much as I know is good. Whether they take it or not is up to them. That’s one reason I’ve started a sports club, to teach the boys sportsmanship. I believe this: You can do what you like to a country, build houses and all, but you can’t really change it without changing the people.

Notes on Chapter 19


2 For more about Inia’s leadership, see Hef Ran Ta (The Morning Star): A Biography of Wilson Inia, by Alan Howard (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1994).
Chapter 20

Experiences Abroad

When I conducted a survey of all households on Rotuma in 1960, 76 percent of adults had been off-island only once or not at all. However, Rotumans had begun travelling abroad as soon as opportunities presented themselves following European intrusion in the 1800s, first by signing on as crewmen aboard European ships, later by seeking employment and educational opportunities in Fiji and beyond. While some Rotumans emigrated without prospects of returning, the accounts in this chapter are by Rotumans who had been abroad but had, by 1960, come back to Rotuma in one capacity or another. Their experiences abroad were often coloured by the expectations of their relatives at home, as illustrated in the following sayings, with Elizabeth Inia’s commentaries, from her 1998 collection, Fāēag ʻes Fūaga:

_A hāeʻak ʻos ūl niu ma ana_ (Remember that our coconut fronds cannot be seen).
A way of telling children going abroad not to expect any help from home. Their island will be far away; once they leave they are on their own. The saying is meant to encourage them to work hard to succeed while abroad.

_It ufag tutu_ (We came from different beaches).
Said to or of people who go abroad to try their best, for they have come from different places. If they do well it speaks well for their place; if they do badly it spoils [the name of their place].

This saying is based on a sense of shared place; _ufaga_ refers to sandy areas near the sea that front people’s houses. If you go abroad and do well, I would comment that we are both Rotumans; if you go abroad and fail, then I would say you are from a different district or village. In the first instance I emphasise our relatedness, in the second instance I deny or downplay it. Can be said to
encourage any Rotuman who is going abroad for study or employment to work hard in order to succeed.

*La hoʻim ke ia riagrāg he* (He will return as a stinkbug).
Jokingly said to Rotumans who go abroad and stay for a long time, meaning they will die abroad and their spirits will come back to Rotuma as stinkbugs. Said to encourage people to return home to Rotuma before they die.

**Fiji**

As members of the Fiji polity since cession in 1881, Rotumans have been able to move freely about the archipelago and have taken advantage of this possibility. The 1956 Fiji census showed that 1,429 Rotumans, or 32 percent of all Rotumans in the colony, were residing in other parts of Fiji. Not only did Fiji offer a chance for people to further their education and find employment not available on Rotuma, but it also catered to the desire of so many young Rotumans to “see the bright lights” of the cities and to experience an urban lifestyle. As the accounts below illustrate, reactions to the experience were mixed. Again, one should keep in mind that these were people who chose to return to Rotuma; accounts by emigrants who chose to stay in Fiji might be more positive.

*Man in his 50s:* It was a great pleasure for me to arrive in Fiji—the land that I had hoped to see since I was a small boy. I managed to get a job as a carpenter. One time, when we went to the other side of the island to work, I met a girl and fell in love with her, so I left my work and stayed back in the girl’s village and married her. The people (Fijians) all treated me as if I were their chief. I never had to work, but the girl’s parents always kept a basin full of kava for me to drink and they encouraged me to talk about my home island. I told them some of the legends of Rotuma and how we lived, and they admired our customs, which were so different from theirs. The longer I stayed there the more I realized how really different their customs were. These people didn’t want me to work, so they
made me feel much lazier than I should have been. My wife and I stayed together for many years and we had six children. I did have some difficulty earning money, though, so that I could provide my wife and children with all their needs.

*Man in his 30s:* One day I heard about people going to Fiji and I asked my father to send me there. He did, and after a few months I found myself walking up and down the Suva path. My father gave me enough money so that I would not have to work because he knew that people like me wouldn’t be able to get a good job in town.

*Man in his 30s:* My elder brother came back from Fiji and I took my chance and left Rotuma for Fiji. I spent a few months away from home but didn’t find any pleasure during the few months I spent in town.

*Man in his 30s:* When I was about 19 years old, I took a trip to Fiji and left my family in Rotuma. I got quickly discouraged though, and any time that I wasn’t doing something to keep myself busy, I would think of my brothers and sisters and the way we had lived together. Thinking of them made me want to come back to Rotuma. After I was in Fiji for six months, I gave up and decided to come back home.

*Man in his 30s:* When I got to Fiji I was sorry that I had gone. I felt terribly homesick. I thought I was better off in Rotuma; the food was more plentiful and the clothes were better; the Fijians went around without a shirt. In Fiji you had to be independent—wash your own clothes. We had practically no ‘i‘ini [meat, fish, eggs], and mostly just urtles [leafy greens], but it was a mysterious thing to me that I became fat. I was very thankful to my parents—every time they sent a letter they sent me cash, ten shillings or so. One peculiar thing—in the ten years that I was away while my mother was alive, she never sent me a single letter, but my father told me that every letter he sent she would read first.

After seven years I had to move to Namosau, in Mba. I spent two and a half years there. Life was even tougher there. They didn’t grow any food there, so we had to buy everything; for ‘i‘ini we had to go to the river and search for kai, a kind of shellfish. Still at that time nothing was settled.
**Rotuman Life Experiences, 1890–1960**

*Man in his 20s:* One day I was told that I was going on a trip to Fiji and there I would stay with my two oldest brothers. My heart beat with joy and I wished the boat would come earlier than expected. The day came and I bid farewell to my parents. When I came to Fiji my eyes were opened wide when I saw the place was so different from my home. Day after day for two whole months I was to be seen in town. Unluckily, I got news that my dear dad was seriously ill, so I returned home on the first available boat.

*Man in his 60s:* I was ordered to go to Makogai [a leper colony in Fiji] because of one of my toes. I had something like an abscess on one of my toes and the doctor advised me to go. I was on Makogai for about two years, and I can’t express how glad I was to return home again.

*Woman in her 30s:* When I was 14 years old my grandmother took me to Fiji and I lived with my mother’s sister and her husband. In the beginning I liked Fiji, because everything was new to me, but when I got used to it I didn’t like it any more. Anytime we wanted something we had to get money for it. Also, I lived with my aunt, but I wasn’t really happy because she wasn’t my real mother, and I couldn’t act with her the way I could have with my own mother. I had to show respect to her and not do anything without her permission. I found out that living in Fiji is very different than living in Rotuma, and I liked Rotuma better. In Fiji I needed money for anything that I wanted, but in Rotuma if you didn’t have the money to get something you could go *fara* [begging] and the owner will give it to you without money.

**New Zealand**

All of the accounts below are from Rotumans who went to New Zealand for tertiary education. Their comments mainly have to do with their reactions to cultural differences that they found fascinating and sometimes disconcerting.

*Man in his 30s:* When I went to New Zealand I was worse off than when I went to Fiji. For one thing I found that the white people are
more unsociable than the coloured people. That was mostly in the school itself, especially in the beginning. Some of the older people, the married ones, were very good to me and brought me to their homes.

*Man in his 30s:* I left for New Zealand in 1956. It took me almost six months to adapt myself—particularly to the social life there. The college I went to was co-educational and residential. Social life there was very high—very advanced in comparison to what I had experienced in Rotuma. Here, there are a lot of restrictions between boys and girls, but there, there was almost complete freedom. I liked it from the beginning, but several things kept me out of the scene. One was that I was conscious all the time that I had been sent by the Rotuman people and I felt obliged to accomplish something and bring it back to them. My main aim was to succeed in my studies. The other thing that kept me out of the social life for the first six months was the attitude of the Europeans in Fiji and Rotuma for the natives. I felt inferior and was very reluctant to take an active part in the social life. But this inferior feeling gradually wore off and I began to make friends and got to know most of the students. I found that there was in fact very little feeling of colour superiority among the European students and the faculty. After the first six months I was very well adapted—too well adapted in fact.

I think that one of the things that made me popular there was the part I played in college sports. They’re not quite like the Americans, but they’re quite keen in sports. I played rugby as one of the first fifteen (first team varsity); participated in track and field—I threw the shotput, javelin and discus; I played soccer on the first eleven, and finally became a representative player for the South Auckland County provincial team. I began to take a very lively part in most of the social functions there. I went to nearly all the social dances and joined several college groups. At first I was very reluctant to partake in dating, but I was more or less encouraged by the friendly response of the girls. To be honest, when I started dating I was still conscious of the fact that I was different. I was always sure that a boyfriend of mine and his date were along. Soon I got used to dating on my own and my self-consciousness died out. In fact I got really used to dating, and perhaps I overdid it. I felt that it was an honour and a privilege to go around with European girls, since it was something that was not
practiced here in Fiji. But even then I felt that it was just a temporary sort of thing. I was never convinced that any of these girls would ever be willing to lead an island life, so I felt that there was no sense proceeding with a romantic affair where one finds it hard to turn back. For me it was just like playing a game. There were times when girls got infatuated, and mistook it for love. Maybe it’s because they were young—only around 19 or 20. I made sure to tell them the facts about island life and made it clear to them that it was hopeless—that they could never be happy in an island life. I considered staying in New Zealand to get an advanced teacher’s certificate, but I never considered staying there permanently.

Man in his 30s: I studied in a general training program and one year of the university course directed by the University of Auckland. New Zealand was absolutely new. It was as big a jump from Suva as Suva was from Rotuma. The first year was quite different for me. The Europeans in Suva don’t mix freely with the coloured people. In New Zealand, the people don’t seem to realise you’re black or brown. There’s no colour bar. It might be there, but I didn’t suffer from it. The people were friendly. One thing that impressed me was the general high standard of living compared with Rotuma and Suva. The methods of teaching also impressed me. There was more freedom for the students. For example, if you strike a student in New Zealand you can be prosecuted for assault. In Fiji and Rotuma, the teachers strike the students quite often, even though there are rules against it. Also the abundance of material things, like books and general school equipment, like sports equipment.

Man in his 20s: I went to New Zealand early in 1954. At first I found it a bit strange. The first thing I noticed was the amount of cars. After being there for a week I started Ardmore Teacher’s college, about eighteen miles from Auckland. I found it easy to adjust to the life there. I didn’t feel strange at all, being with Europeans. There were many Maoris, Cook Islanders, and Samoans there. Besides, I had many European friends in Suva and had lived on and off with a New Zealand couple—he was a teacher. I spent three holidays with them. The only thing that really seemed strange to me was the size of the place. I didn’t find the schoolwork itself very hard. Most of it was just educational.
courses. I had some difficulty with physical education theory because some of the terms were new, and I hadn’t any experience with some of the activities that were included.

I wasn’t used to the social activities at the start. I wasn’t used to the idea of courting. At first I was rather embarrassed to ask a girl to go to the pictures, but I was lucky because on the boat to New Zealand I met two part-Maori women who had a niece in the college, and they wrote me a letter of introduction to her. I got to know her and she introduced me to a lot of other girls. There were about 800 girls and about 200 boys, so the girls would try to get the boys to date them. So about four or five months after I started, I began to date. I dated throughout the two years, but I never had any intention of having any serious affairs. For one thing it was against regulations for me to get married in New Zealand, and secondly I didn’t want to get a wife I couldn’t support. Someone who was used to living in New Zealand would be apt to demand more than I could give her in life here in Rotuma.

I stayed in New Zealand until the middle of 1956. I got out of college at the end of 1955 but spent the last six months roaming around New Zealand, taking different jobs. My first job was on a sheep farm. I worked for a building contractor, on a wharf, in the freezing works, and as a delivery boy. I enjoyed that period very much. I saw a lot of people and a lot of places. I spent most of my other holidays visiting with people who had invited me to their homes. One time I hitch-hiked around 390 miles with my friend.

By the way, I was not supposed to work in New Zealand. It was the first thing they told me when I got off the boat. But they were lenient with me because I had been using my real name instead of a false one. Also, the people in Fiji didn’t know where I was, and the agency in New Zealand had been instructed to send me straight to Suva as soon as they got into contact with me. I went back to Auckland in April and saw the agency and they made my reservations back to Suva. The first plane I could catch was in July.

Man in his 20s: I applied for the priesthood and was accepted. I was sent to New Zealand to Holy Cross College to study philosophy. I found New Zealand very cold. I was a bit apprehensive about going to New Zealand because there was a definite colour bar in Fiji, and I didn’t know how I would fit in in a country of all white people. I remember how shocked I was the first time I saw a Maori overseer over white men. I found that the people in New Zealand
were different all together. There was no discrimination whatsoever. If the rest of the world was like New Zealand, then the things that people like Leslie Cheshire and people like that write about colour bar is not true. Also, the whole way of life was different. In Fiji life is geared to the natives, but in New Zealand the people have a broader outlook on life.

**Australia**

At the time, Australia was a main centre for both the Methodist and Catholic religions in the Pacific. The Australian churches played a significant role in training clergy and, for Methodist ministers, provided a venue for deputation work, as the following two accounts illustrate.

*Catholic brother in his 20s:* I stayed in Sydney for four years. I found Sydney very cold. I found life very different, especially the food. I found the boys in the noviciate very friendly. There were five nationalities represented: Tongans, Fijians, Samoans, Solomon Islanders and Australians. There were also two of us Rotumans there. I didn’t feel very lonesome because we had made friends with the Fijian fellows before we left. In Australia they spoke English.

After I finished with the noviciate I was sent to the New Hebrides to be a mechanic. The American brother at Port Villa taught me to be a mechanic. I stayed there for three years. I enjoyed this time very much. I liked the work, it was very interesting. I learned to fix cars and all kinds of mechanical things. When I left there I was 25 years old and trained as a mechanic.

*Methodist minister in his 50s:* I was sent by the Church to Australia to do deputation work—encourage people in Australia to donate to the overseas mission. I left my wife and two children at Davuilevu…. Australia was very strange to me—the language and the coolness. I was still very weak in English. I stayed in Australia almost nine months. During that time I travelled a lot and sometimes stayed in two different homes in one week. Most of the time I spent visiting peoples’ homes. I also visited schools and churches and preached on Sundays. After nine months in a strange country, I was happy to come back to Fiji again….
I answered a church advertisement for a native minister to work among the half-castes in Northern Australia. The Church accepted and I was appointed there in 1940. I spent five years in Northern Australia and a year in Sydney. I only spent one year with the half-castes; after that they evacuated the half-castes and our women and children south, because of the war. My wife and children were sent to Sydney and I transferred to native work—working with the Aborigines. It was very hard—the language was difficult. It wasn’t so much religious work that I did among them; it was mostly agricultural work. Every morning we took them to the field, planting sweet potatoes.

**Solomon Islands**

Some Rotumans went to other islands to do mission work, and their families sometimes accompanied them. As one woman in her 20s recalled, this posed challenges:

My husband [who was a catechist] and I went to Fiji and then to the Solomon Islands. There I found life harder than I ever knew; I met people of different races whose customs and languages were so different from ours. My husband was far from home and instead of being kind to me he was worse than my father. Life seemed so dark to me, and the thought of home was always ringing around in my brain. How my heart yearned for home. Whenever he was tired or angry with the natives, he mostly came and took it out on me.

We stayed for many years on this island and we had three children, so when we came back to Fiji we and our children could speak the language. My heart beat for joy when I heard that we were to come back to Rotuma; home sweet home.

**Sailing**

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, once European ships started calling at the island in the early 1800s, Rotumans developed a seafaring tradition as crew members aboard those ships. Rotuman men eagerly signed aboard visiting vessels, soon acquiring a reputation for reliability.
and competence that made them favourites of European ship captains. As a result, a significant portion of Rotuman men gained extensive experience at sea and also in the pearl-diving industry. In a letter published in the *Methodist Missionary Notices* in 1870, Reverend William Fletcher wrote that around 700 men were known to have left the island recently, and in a report about Rotuma published in 1885–1886, William Allardyce wrote, “Nearly all the men on the island have at one time or another been to sea.”¹ Seafaring remained an attractive option for both employment and adventure,² fuelled by tales shared by sailors who eventually returned, such as this 1960 account from a man in his 30s:

After I was in Fiji for a while, I got a job as a sailor on an overseas boat. I sailed to some big places, like Australia and America. There I saw the most wonderful things I had ever seen in my whole life. On my first visit to one of those countries I couldn’t believe it. It was so wonderful that I thought I might be coming to enter heaven. The moving of the lights and the colours were fantastic. The first trip I was afraid, but when I got used to it I liked it very much. I saw plenty of beautiful and exciting things and for a while I couldn’t think of anything else. I think that when I was sailing it was the happiest time of my life. When you’re a sailor you can see plenty of new and exciting things. I also saw the most beautiful girls that I had ever seen. Some of them were so beautiful that when I saw their faces I couldn’t believe they were real people.

**Notes on Chapter 20**

For more on this topic, see “Rotuman Seafaring in Historical Perspective,” by Alan Howard, in *Seafaring in the Contemporary Pacific Islands*, edited by Richard Feinberg (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995).
From a social standpoint, proper relationships in Rotuma were expected to balance over time, with each person giving as much as they took. Exchanges could involve labour, food, political support, money, or other valuables in various combinations, but to be considered a fully competent person one had to give as much as one received. Giving less than one received diminished a person’s status proportionately vis-à-vis those who gave more. To elevate or maintain one’s status in the community therefore required either access to resources or the capacity to work, or both.

The social circumstances of a person with a diminished ability to contribute to a household or community depended on how the impairment affected his or her ability to produce food, weave mats, earn money, and so on. A temporary illness was likely to have little effect on one’s social standing, but long-term illnesses and impairments associated with old age could result in a lessening of a person’s status within their communities and families, along with a resultant loss of self-esteem. The ways in which individuals responded to such circumstances is the focus of this chapter, as well as ways of coping with death.

Health Issues

A dramatic increase in health problems for the Rotuman population began with European intrusion in the early part of the nineteenth century. Europeans introduced diseases such as influenza, measles, and whooping cough to which Rotumans had low immunity because of their previous isolation. Influenza epidemics were documented in 1891 (120 recorded...
386 deaths), 1896 (8 deaths), and 1928 (43 deaths); a measles epidemic in 1911 was particularly virulent and resulted in 401 deaths; and whooping cough epidemics occurred in 1907 (37 deaths), 1914 (19 deaths), 1925 (34 deaths), 1934 (46 deaths), and 1952 (39 deaths). In addition, such afflictions as yaws, scrofulous sores, eye disease, and elephantiasis were prevalent. Health conditions on the island began to get better in the 1930s when the district commissioner introduced public health measures aimed at improving sanitary conditions along with the appointment of public health nurses to work in the villages, but it was not until after World War II, when antibiotic drugs were introduced, that morbidity and mortality dropped dramatically. Thus, whereas the crude death rate between 1890 and 1930 was consistently above 40 per thousand, during the 1930s it dropped to around 25 per thousand and progressively fell to a low of 8.6 per thousand in the late 1950s. Infant mortality was particularly high in the early part of the twentieth century, averaging around 282 per thousand in the 1920s. The rate dropped to 145 per thousand in the 1930s, and then to 103 per thousand in the 1940s as a result of improved public health measures, but it remained a concern through the 1950s.1

Responses to Illness

In my study of Rotuman healing practices conducted during 1960,2 I reported that the most general concept for illness, ‘af’afa, referred to a condition of weakness, although several other terms were used for describing specific symptoms. When an illness persisted and did not respond to treatment, the assumption was that the person was close to death. This is reflected in the saying ‘Åp ta ‘el pau la uf’ (The string is about to break).
The following recollections of experiences with illness, both one’s own and one’s family members’, provide insight into the concerns that serious illnesses provoked. Especially in evidence is a concern for how illness can be a threat to the ability to fulfil social obligations.

*Man in his 30s:* About that time my mother became seriously ill with a sore on her knee and was taken to the hospital in Suva and had her foot cut off. I felt sorry for her because I knew she wouldn’t be able to do her work properly. Now she is walking with the help of two walking sticks and I know she feels the difference between now and before her foot was cut off.

*Woman in her 60s:* One day, a few years ago, I was taken seriously ill and was taken to the hospital. I did worry about myself, but I was mostly concerned about my children, especially my youngest son who hadn’t gotten married yet.

*Woman in her 40s:* My husband was once taken seriously ill and really I didn’t know what to do. I thought of my dear children and wondered if he died who was going to take care of us, but luckily he recovered again and is looking after us.

*Woman in her 30s:* Once I got seriously ill and was taken to the hospital and I was worried about my children. They don’t know yet how to do their clothes and clean themselves. If I die my children will be left behind and I don’t know whether they’ll be living a happy life or not…. I am glad that I am up again and have a chance to look after my children again.

Illness as a source of acute anxiety is clearly expressed by a nurse (age unknown) whose sister became dangerously ill.

At the beginning of last year, something happened that made me so worried I thought it would never be cleared. My younger sister became seriously ill and was taken to the hospital in Ahau and yet we, the nurses and the doctor, couldn’t cure her illness, so she was taken to the hospital in Fiji. I wasn’t allowed to go with her, and
another nurse went instead of me. I stayed home, sending
telegrams asking the matron in C. W. M. Hospital about my
sister’s illness. When I got news that she was improving, it lifted a
heavy load off my shoulders. I felt normal again and began to do
my work as usual. Now my sister is home with her husband and
she is as strong and healthy as one can ever see.

Illness could also be seen as a form of immanent justice, and as
punishment for past misdeeds, as illustrated in the following commentary
from a man in his 30s:

Unluckily, starting in 1954 until today, I have suffered from
filariasis and filarial fever. Having a family to take care of makes it
even harder for me. But I think now that the reason I’m sick is
because of the way I used to act when I was a young boy—always
destroying things. I think I’m being punished by God for all the
bad things I did when I was younger.

Failure to achieve important life goals as a result of illness figures in
the account of man in his 20s who had aspired to the priesthood.

At the end of my second year [of seminary], I had a nervous
breakdown and had to leave college for six months. I blame myself.
I had always come in first since Standard 6 and I wanted to keep
up here. I also felt that a priest had to meet all kinds of problems—
genuine problems and people from other religions who would try
to trap you. I felt I had to have everything completely in hand, and
I guess I drove myself too hard.

I got to the point where I couldn’t sleep at night and would lie
awake night after night, thinking of unsolved problems. After many
weeks like that I would get very touchy, and it got to the point at
times when too much noise would make me scream. Half of the
time I didn’t know why I had acted that way. I’d have a row and
not know why I acted that way. The professors noticed this and
had me see a doctor, and the doctor recommended a six-month
rest. It was during that time that I first started to doubt whether or
not I wanted to become a priest. I had been awarded a seat in the
College of Propaganda in Rome but was left behind because of my breakdown. I was supposed to go after the next year, but I thought of how much pressure I was under in New Zealand and knew it would be worse in Rome. I completed the third year at Holy Cross, but having the nervous breakdown knocked off all my self-confidence. The Catholic Church would have had to pay for my education in Rome, and I was afraid I would be a failure. It was pride, I guess. Now that I think of it I guess it wasn’t a very good reason to quit. If my parents had been paying for it I might have tried. I asked the Bishop if I might complete my priest’s training in New Zealand and then go to Rome afterwards, but he refused, and if you don’t take the Bishop’s word, they don’t permit you to go into the priesthood.

**Old Age**

The Rotuman saying *As ta ifoana* (The sun is going down) implied that one was no longer youthful and that one’s body was growing weak. This might have been said in relation to an older person who was having difficulty performing common chores and contributing to household economies. A more critical saying, *Mafua kai’uge* (Old conch shell), suggested that someone had advanced in age but was still not mature. As Elizabeth Inia explained in *Fäeag 'es Füaga* (1998), this was said of someone who was old but unable to do things properly: a woman who was married and had children but was unable to plait mats or make baskets, a man who did not know how to make canoes or coconut graters, and so on. A conch shell has to be blown to make it sound; though old, such people had to be told what to do and were considered unable to think for themselves. Another saying, *Mafua ‘ā fikou* (Old ones eat hermit crabs), has a similar meaning regarding the old person who does not know how to do certain things competently according to Rotuman custom. Hermit crabs are used as bait when fishing, but if someone fails to catch any fish, he might eat the crab instead. (The saying can also be used as an excuse by someone to avoid a
task that would cause embarrassment if not done properly. It was also a way of expressing humility and saying, “Do not expect too much of me.”

On a more positive note, an elder who dances with consummate skill after a period of retirement can be applauded and praised with the saying ‘Uhag ta rahra mase ‘on isu (The end of the log has been covered with ash). The saying refers to the heavy logs that frame a kowa (earth oven); they burn until they appear to be reduced to ash, but the embers beneath the ash burn for some time afterwards and can be used to ignite another fire. Similarly, the saying implies that there’s still life in the old man or woman.

Below are some of the commentaries by persons of advanced age regarding their life circumstances at the time of their interview. They reflect an uppermost concern for how their advancing limitations have led to dependence on adult children or other kin.

*Man in his 60s:* Now my wife and I are getting old. Only my daughters are helping me now, working in the plantations, cutting copra, and looking after the cows and pigs. Most days I have to stay in the house with only one of my daughters helping me. I feel sorry … and I wish I could be strong again like before so that I could look after all of us…. A few years ago I got seriously ill…. When I got well again I was as deaf as one could imagine … and I couldn’t go anywhere without someone with me. Now I can hear again and it feels like I was dead and came back to life…. I’m now old, but healthy and strong enough to work in my plantations and afford my family, with the help of my dear daughter, with whatever they need.

*Man in his 60s:* Now my wife and I are old and there is only one of my daughters and her children taking care of us. Most of the days I have to stay in bed, and only my grandsons are supplying us with food. I can see that they are doing their best, but it is so pitiful for me to watch them working so hard to supply our whole family with
our needs…. Now I am very weak and in ill health, so that only my grandsons are left to supply our family with what we need.

*Man in his 60s:* I was often sick with headaches and the doctor told me it was my teeth that caused it, so he told me to take out all my teeth, which I did a few months ago, and I went to Fiji and had two sets of false teeth made and came back on the last boat. Now I’m very old, with all white hair covering my head. I’m staying with my wife in her home and doing my best to care for her and her daughter. The son is out of school and is a big helper to me. He is doing what he can and I am pleasing myself, just doing what I wish to do every day.

*Man in his 60s:* Now I am getting old—I’m more than 60 now—and my two youngest sons and my daughter are taking care of us. I can still work on the plantations and help them in light work, but not like before when I was strong and healthy.

*Man in his 60s:* Now my wife is weak and has to walk with the help of a stick, while unluckily I have become blind, and now both of us have to stay in the house waiting for our son and his wife to give us food and water, and anything that we need. I feel pity on my son, being that I’m not very old and am a blind man, and cannot give him any help. What a thing to happen! It would be better for me to die than to stay like this without any hope of seeing the glittering of the stars or the rays of the sun anymore.

*Man in his 60s:* Now I am old and whenever I feel sick I always think of my [late] wife, because we haven’t got a daughter, and in spite of her weakness in her later years, she always did her best to stay with me and she would sometimes massage the sore parts of my body. Now I’m staying home with my two sons and their wives. I’m unable to help them in any kind of work because I’m very old and feel sick very often, and because of that I stay in the house like an old woman.

*Woman in her 60s:* By now my youngest daughter had a husband and I am living with them and my grandchildren (eldest daughter’s children). My son-in-law is a very kind man. He works very hard every day since my husband and I are very old and feeble and we are counted to be like children. But he takes good care of us—like
we were his own parents. He does everything we want him to do for us. The only thing I can do now is to look after the children when they are asleep, but I am unable to do any hard work, just sleep and eat like other children do.

*Woman in her 60s:* Now I am living with my sister’s son. I am an old woman over 60 years of age—the fire-maker of our family. I cook day after day, but my nephew and his wife and children are always roaming around. If any of my other relations bring me something, they just come and take it away from me. I am really badly treated by my family but I just pray and ask for the strength to face all the bad things which I may meet with. Some of my other relations wanted me to came and live with them, but I just thanked them, for an old woman like myself should never go from home to any other places. No matter how ill-treated I am, I will stay with my nephew until I die. It’s a good thing I never got married or had any children, because these people might not have taken care of us. I do think they just keep me to do their work and be in the house when they wish to go somewhere and stay overnight. I may always be seen in our sleeping-house or in the cooking-house.

**Experiencing Death**

As in all societies, the deaths of family members and close associates was responded to in Rotuma with expressions of grief that ranged from various forms of self-mutilation and long periods of mourning to more muted periods of sadness.³

While self-mutilation was no longer practiced in 1960, expressions of grief at funerals, especially in the presence of the deceased, often involved wailing, tears, and related demonstrations of emotional distress. In relating their experiences in coping with grief, people spoke in terms such as “sadness” (*raofaki*), feeling “sick” (*reag 'af'af*) or “sorry” (*hanis'ia*), “losing interest in life” (*tokan 'e pa maur*), and “losing their mind” (*jaurara'ia*). Here are some examples:
Woman in her 40s: Unluckily, there was an epidemic of dysentery over this island and we all got it except one of my unmarried brothers, and in a couple of days my father died. I was so sick that I wasn’t able to go and see my father’s funeral. My mother, too, was very sick and she didn’t even know who had taken my father to the cemetery. When I recovered I thought of my father and began to cry, thinking of his kindness to all of us, his children. He never used harsh words with us. Whenever he was angry with one of us he just told us not to do that again. We really miss him.

Woman in her 40s: Unluckily, my mother died a year after our marriage, and everyone could imagine the sadness that overtook me during the day of her funeral and a few days afterwards. I really felt sorry for her death, because I knew she loved me a great deal and never used harsh words with me.

Woman, age unknown: On the day my husband died, I thought I would go mad. I knew he really loved me because when we first got married I thought we might be like others—some people who get married and have rows after four or five months—but this didn’t happen to us. He was nice to me from the beginning until the time he died.

Man in his 60s: My mother became very ill one day with pneumonia and died after a week. To tell the truth I couldn’t resist crying aloud as if I were a woman. I had been trying my very best to work so that one day we might make a family of our own. I felt as if I wouldn’t feel like working again. How sad to think of her, and to picture the unhappy days when she was carrying me in her arms; and to think of her bringing me up without someone to help her; and the way she used to tell me to stay out of bad company and to try to grow up to be a kind person to my neighbours. Even if I were to fulfil all her wishes she wouldn’t be there to see it.

Man in his 50s: One of my brothers died and for a whole year I kept thinking about him and feeling very sad. It was a year before I could forget about him.

Man in his 30s: I can remember the day I learned my mother had died. I was a sacristan, preparing the altar for the Mass, when Father Foley called me out and told me the sad news that my
mother had passed away. Everything looked bad to me…. It made it much worse to be away from home … it’s worse than if you’re among your own people. I lost interest in everything. I just did what others did, but with no life. For the first week I didn’t sleep well, didn’t eat well. I thought of how much my mother would have liked to see me as a priest, but now she had died. Even now I feel bad when I see someone with their mother. I really think that the best person in the world is your mother. Your brothers and sisters may be loyal to you, but your mother’s your own flesh. All the good I had in mind to do for her materially, I couldn’t do.

*Man in his 30s:* After I had been sailing for a few years I got a note from my mother. I started to read it and in the first line I read that my father had died. I dropped the note and started to cry, and couldn’t finish the letter. I thought about the time I was with my father and knew that I would really miss him. On that day I couldn’t do anything—just look at the sky and cry and think of him, knowing I would never see him again.

*Woman in her 60s:* Soon after I got married my father died, when I was about 30 years old. For four months after my father died I thought I was going to die too. I was always thinking of him, and no matter what my husband did to make me happy I still felt sad. It wasn’t until about two years after that that I started to forget it.

*Woman in her 60s:* I was a young girl when my mother died and I felt very sad because I knew that my father was older and very soon I would be alone. There was no other woman to be seen at home to be like my mother. How dear I was to her and how she always taught me to do this and that. For weeks and months tears always came down whenever I stayed idle and thought of her, or whenever my father and I spoke and came upon her name. What a pity to see me, a lame person, taking care of my old father. Only a year passed and my dear father died and left me lonely and forlorn. How anybody could imagine the sadness which came upon me.

The death of children understandably resulted in strong emotional grieving:
**Woman in her 40s:** How could you imagine the sadness that overtook me when my daughters died, one after the other. I wanted a daughter because I love girls, so because we had no more children, I took my cousin’s daughter and then a son and adopted them as my own. How I love kids to be with me at home.

**Man in his 60s:** Then a great sorrow came into my life. Two of my sons were killed in the bomb explosion at Juju. No one can imagine the sadness that I felt, losing two sons at one time. I nearly lost my mind because of the great loss that befell me.

**Woman in her 60s:** My elder daughter left school and got married to a young boy in the village. They had only three children when my daughter died. You can imagine how sad I was. I fainted many times and I felt like I could lose my mind whenever my thoughts would turn to my daughter.

In addition to emotional expressions of grief, another prominent theme involved people’s reflecting on what the deceased had done to provide for their wants and needs, or how they would be missing the opportunity to take care of the person who had died. This notion of providing support is, it will be recalled, the essence of hanisi. It implies emotional attachment without giving it the primary, sometimes exclusive, connotation that the word “love” has in English.

**Woman in her 30s:** My brother died when I was 13 years old and I felt very sad for a long time—for about a year. I knew that only he would do everything I wanted, so when he died I knew I’d never get the things I want easily.

**Man in his 30s:** Then my father died when I was about 13 years old. After my father died we started to live very poorly. I thought about my father for five years, because he was a kind man to us and gave us whatever we wanted. I felt bad because if I wanted something I could not get it and I was too young to work for it. That’s why I thought about him for so long.
Man in his 50s: For nearly a whole year after my father and mother died I felt bad whenever I would think of them. Sometimes, if I would think of them too much, I would cry. The times I thought of them most was when I wanted something and couldn’t get it. Then I would think of the time I was young and they were alive, and how they would always get me what I wanted.

Man in his 50s: A couple of years after that my dear mother died, leaving my father and us without a woman to take care of us. How sad I was to think of her. I wished she were alive so that we could take care of all her needs, and make up for the miserable life she had when we were young. I had seen her so often with a sad face, but she couldn’t tell us why. But now she was dead, and who could we get to look after our things, since we were all men.

Man in his 60s: My uncle [adoptive father] died during a sudden sickness. I felt so sorry because I wished him to live longer so that I could have the chance to return to him his kindness to me.

Man in his 60s: My mother died a few years after our wedding. My wife and I really loved her. She was a kind woman to everybody and I found out that she had lived a rough life with my father. My father is still living, and I wish my mother were still alive, too, so that I could look after them as best I can.

For some, the death of a senior family member resulted in an increased burden concerning family responsibilities.

Man in his 30s: After my father died I felt very bad. We were very poor and it seemed like such a big burden for me to look after my mother and brothers properly. Nearly every night I would lie awake thinking of the next day and try to plan ahead. I would think of the time when my father was still living and sometimes I felt so discouraged that I thought I was going to die.

Woman in her 60s: Unfortunately, my father got seriously ill one day and died shortly afterwards. I felt so sad that I cried for many days. My husband felt the same way, too. My mother … became very old and after a few years she, too, died. I felt strange after she was
gone because I didn’t have a parent left to show me what was the right thing to do when it came to Rotuman customs. Who could I ask questions to when I did not know what should be done when something was called for?

*Woman in her 30s:* When I reached the age of 14, my auntie became very ill and I was forced to leave school so that I could stay home to look after her. After a few months in bed she died, leaving my uncle and myself. You could not imagine how sorry I was, for I knew that now I would have to look after my uncle and myself. There was nobody to be trusted except myself. Now there wasn’t anybody to do whatever I wished for or to help me with the domestic work. I had to do all the daily work myself before the thoughts of my auntie had hardly faded away. At that time I hardly knew how to cook or get a meal ready for my uncle and myself. But after a few years I was able to manage our home and my uncle trusted me as much as if my aunt were still alive.

*Man in his 60s:* My wife unluckily died, leaving all our children for me to care for. I felt so strange and very sad about her death because there wasn’t anyone wiser to look after my children except my oldest daughter who had to leave school and stay home to do the work, like cleaning the yard and washing the clothes. I always thought of my wife when I saw my daughter taking her place at home.

And, as with illness, the death of a person could be considered an instance of immanent justice, as exemplified by the following:

*Man in his 30s:* A few years passed when a great suffering came upon me. One of my five children died a sudden death. He seemed to be poisoned by something. How sad I was to think of it, but it dawned on me that maybe it was a punishment given me for how I had treated the older people in our village.
Notes on Chapter 21


Afterword

One of the more striking themes in the life stories documented in *Rotuman Life Experiences 1890–1960* is the degree to which relationships are based on material support by those in authority, both within the family in the form of parents and parental surrogates vis-à-vis their children and in the broader community in the form of chiefs vis-à-vis their subjects. Expectations are that, in the long run, such support will be reciprocated. Thus, balancing out reflections on the generosity of their parents who have gratified their wants and needs as children are expressions of wanting to care for those parents in their declining years. And chiefs as redistributive agents of goods they receive at ceremonies are rewarded with the labour of their constituents for community events and periodic gifts.

To add a personal observation from years of field work on Rotuma regarding reciprocity: Unlike the practice common in Western urban society of reciprocating as soon as possible, in Rotuma it is considered appropriate to allow some time to transpire before reciprocating so that an imbalance persists in the form of an obligation. Over time, giving and receiving tend to balance out, but obligations constitute the glue of relationships.

Importance of Work as a Social Value

Related to the concern for a balanced reciprocity is the importance attributed to work, both as a means of fulfilling obligations to kinsmen and the community and as a way of advancing one’s own career. In many of the life stories, various individuals are acknowledged as working hard to support the family, and the story tellers often expressed the ambition to be able to work hard on behalf of their households or, in some cases, their
Rotuman Life Experiences, 1890–1960

communities. On the flip side is the anxiety expressed concerning illness and old age, which may curtail the ability of individuals to work hard and force them to become dependent on the labour of others. Another striking theme is the persistence that people displayed in coping with or overcoming great difficulties throughout their lives.

Role of Schooling in Life Trajectories
The role of schooling in shaping the trajectory of peoples lives is clearly evident in the life stories. The gradual development of Rotuma’s school systems was a major factor insofar as people born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had little or no schooling available to them, other than what the missionaries could provide.

Not until the late 1920s did the Government of Fiji assume responsibility for educating children, and only in 1936 was school made compulsory. Among the younger cohort of life story tellers (those in their 20s and 30s in 1960), reactions to formal education were split between those who enjoyed the experience and worked hard to succeed, and those who disliked school and couldn’t wait to drop out. Many of the former went on to further education and entered the professions or assumed managerial positions, while most of the latter remained at home in the traditional mode, with males taking on responsibilities for providing food for their families as farmers and fishermen, and females filling domestic roles within their households.

Among the older cohorts, those in their 40s and above, the main opportunity for men to escape traditional roles was to sign aboard ships and become sailors for a period of time, while women were essentially deprived of alternate possibilities to domestic life on the island, or for those who migrated, in Fiji.
Gender Roles

It is evident from this sample of life accounts that during this period in Rotuman history men had more opportunities open to them than women did. During adolescence, girls were much more confined than boys, and while young men were able to take advantage of opportunities to travel as sailors and to find work in Fiji, women mostly remained in domestic roles within households. Among the younger cohorts, women who were able to continue their education in Fiji mostly became teachers, nurses, or, if they were Catholic, nuns, while men had a broader range of options. On the island, only men became chiefs.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to conclude that women were regarded as socially inferior to men. As women were the producers of *apei* (fine mats), the main form of traditional wealth, their work on Rotuma was highly valued, and as the life stories of both men and women make clear, women exercised considerable influence within family groupings as well as the broader community, especially as the wives of chiefs. It also seems clear from the life stories that men were as concerned with pleasing their wives and female relatives as women were with pleasing their husbands and male relatives. Rotuma was definitely not a patriarchal society at the time.

Sensitivity to Gossip and Shaming

Throughout the accounts there are references to actual or potentially embarrassing situations that caused anxiety and were either avoided completely or kept secret. This was particularly the case during adolescence, when teasing and gossip were rampant regarding suspected romances. While teasing is very much a part of Rotuman culture and for the most part is taken in good humour, it can be painful in some
circumstances, especially when it implies a shortcoming or criticism of the someone’s behaviour. Teasing and gossip can therefore be seen as a means of social control and as a way of promoting conformity to cultural norms.

Marriage and In-law Relations
The preferred form of marriage throughout this period was for it to be arranged by the parental generation, with or without the explicit consent of the prospective bride and groom. The life stories include instances in which such marriages worked out just fine and other instances that failed. There is also considerable evidence of friction with in-laws that took a toll on the success of some marriages. In part this may have been the result of a strong sense of obligation to one’s parents as well as to one’s spouse.

Concluding Thoughts
It has been sixty years since my initial research in Rotuma, which, as pointed out in the foreword, changed my life in many ways for the better. I did not return to the island until 1987, this time with my wife Jan, who began her own dissertation research the following year. We have visited Rotuma many times since, not only for research purposes but also to visit with the many friends whose lives have become intertwined with ours. We have also spent a good deal of time with Rotumans abroad in Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, England, Norway, Canada, and the United States. We have also engaged in almost a daily manner with Rotumans around the world. Rotumans now occupy the very core of our social network along with our immediate non-Rotuman relatives. More than mere friendship is involved. Because in Rotuman culture blood is not the exclusive basis for kinship, we have become kainag pau to many. Our immediate family now includes two sigoa (namesakes)—Harieta Janet Vilsoni and Hatamara
Titifanue Shaw—as well as Yvonne Aitu Sunia-Mafileo and her brother, Walter Aitu, both of whom we have informally adopted with the approval of their father, Aisea Aitu, who was a very close friend. The children of Yvonne and Walter and their respective spouses are our mapiga. There are also quite a few other Rotumans whom we regard not just as friends but as family (and they know who they are!).

In sum, Jan’s and my lives have been profoundly affected by our experience within the global Rotuman community. In the years since our 1987 trip to Rotuma and subsequent visits to Rotuman communities abroad, we have been able to follow the life pathways of many Rotumans and part-Rotumans of younger generations, and we are greatly impressed with their accomplishments and the degree to which they continue to draw on their Rotuman heritage. The fact that we feel so much pride in the kinds of people they have become is testimony to the degree that our own sense of identity has become Rotuman in nature.