

# A Library for Nanumea

*Vione Napoto*

Nanumea Island is the most northerly island in the Tuvalu group 4° south of the Equator and 200 kilometres from the main island of Funafuti. It can be reached by ship from Funafuti, a voyage of one and half days on board the government vessel Nivaga. Nanumea is an atoll with a central lagoon and four small islands, only one of which is inhabited.

The population of approximately 1000 lives in two villages separated by common or 'island' land where the Tuvalu Church and the maneapa are built. The economy is a subsistence one of fishing and gardening with cash earned through the occasional sale of fish to the co-operative in Funafuti or by the sale of handicrafts to the Government Handicraft Centre. Nanumea is administered by an Island Council (of government employees).

Kaumaile School is situated by the lagoon and is one of the biggest schools in Tuvalu with 170 pupils and 8 teachers plus the Head Teacher. Children start school at the age of 5+ and continue to Class 10. When they are in Class 6 they sit an examination which can give them entry to Motufoua Secondary School for Form 1. Otherwise they continue at school in the Community Training Centre for Classes 8, 9 and 10.

The school is controlled and supported by a Parents Association who meet every term and who organise committees to raise funds for the school.

The idea of building a library arose because books that had been sent to the school were not being used. They were stored instead in a small dark room that was far too hot for children to use even if they were allowed to. The importance of books in education was realised and the need for good books, and for the time to read and enjoy them. Books can be a 'voiceless teacher' helping readers improve their understanding of subjects and enlarging their understanding of the world they live in. Books help children learn about the past, about nowadays and about the future. It therefore, seemed vital to make a library.

To begin building a library required lots of discussions between the School Committee and the Island Council. This was the first time that a Library had been built for a school. At first the Island Council refused but as the discussions continued they began to understand that it was a good idea. However, it was the community's responsibility to build it.

The Library has been built in the traditional way. The floor is concrete but the walls are of interwoven pandanus trunks with screens of dry coconut leaves to provide shade and shelter. The roof is thatched with pandanus. Inside it is cool, light, and airy, an attractive and welcoming place for books and keen readers. Each village provided four workers to build the library and provided food for them.

The library will soon be open and it is hoped that children will use it as part of their language programme and that the community will feel free to come in the afternoon. A librarian will be employed to work with the teachers and to encourage everyone to value and use the library.

A library needs a good supply, and a continuing supply, of books that are enjoyable and worth reading. At the moment the library collection consists of books and magazines that have been donated. There are School Journals, some Ladybird Books, and supplementary reading books. So the next task will be to acquire more books.

There are many books in English that are suitable for the children and adults of Nanumea Island. Traditional stories and picture books of good quality are universal in their appeal and in their message. Funding and selection are the requirements for such collections.

In the meantime reading material can be developed through ingenuity. A school newspaper has been suggested with news, poems and stories written in the Tuvalu language. Writing your own reading material is a good way of developing writing in the school and in the community.

Teachers in Tuvalu have already been experimenting with Handmade Books, writing traditional stories, rhymes, songs and stories for early reading in book form. They have made books shaped like fish, fans, coconuts, octopuses... works of art that are enjoyed and *read* by children.

A set of these books is to be published in an economical but attractive

form with the help of New Zealand School Publications. Although most of the books will be used to help children learn to read there will be a collection of traditional rhymes that will be appreciated by all the community.

The best of English children's literature, Handmade Books of every size, shape and topic in the Tuvalu language and published Tuvalu books would make a perfect community library. It was difficult to get a library at first but the community of Nanumea persisted. Perhaps soon there will be a collection of books worthy of such a library.

