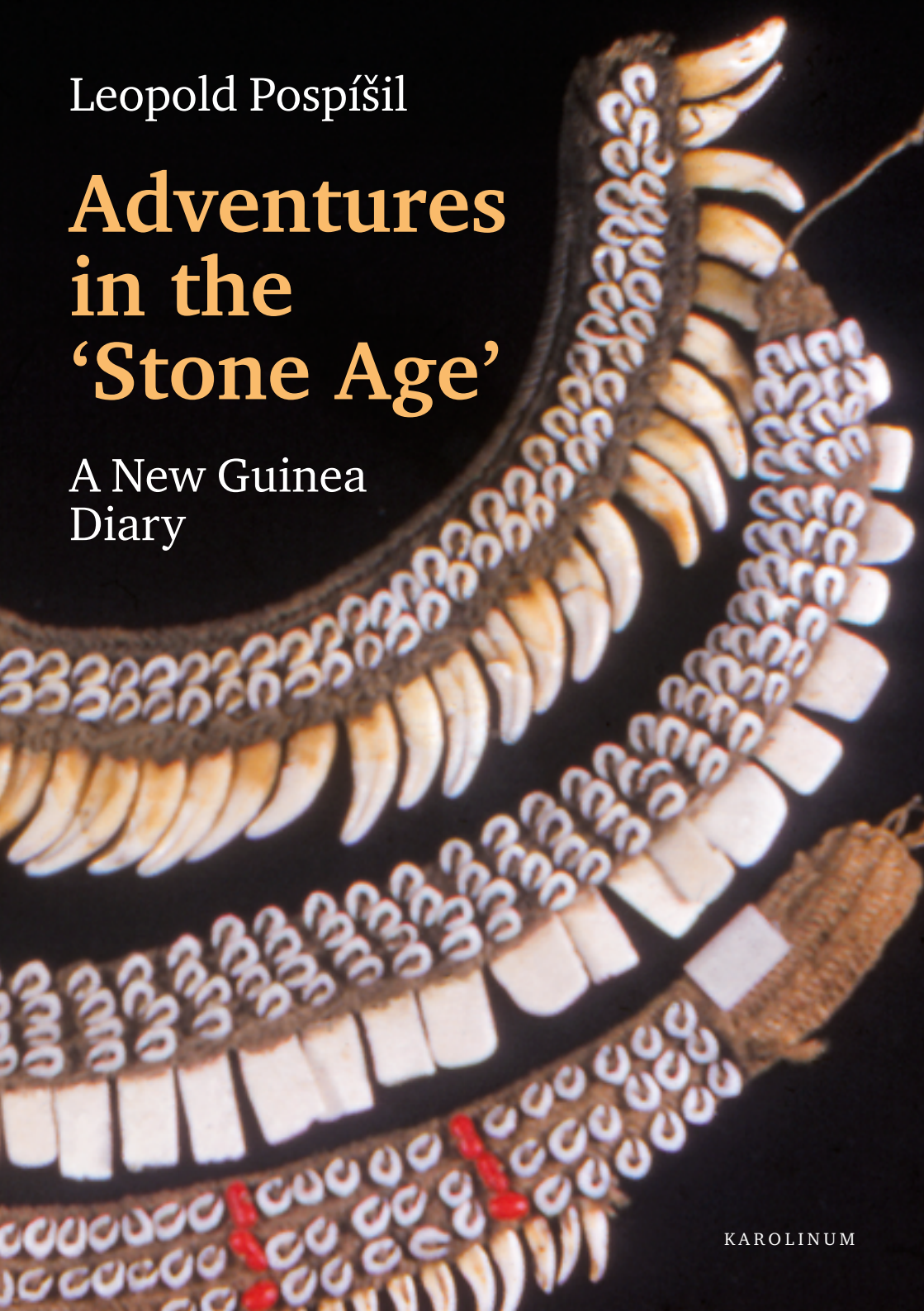


Leopold Pospíšil

Adventures in the 'Stone Age'

A New Guinea
Diary



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Note on the Title

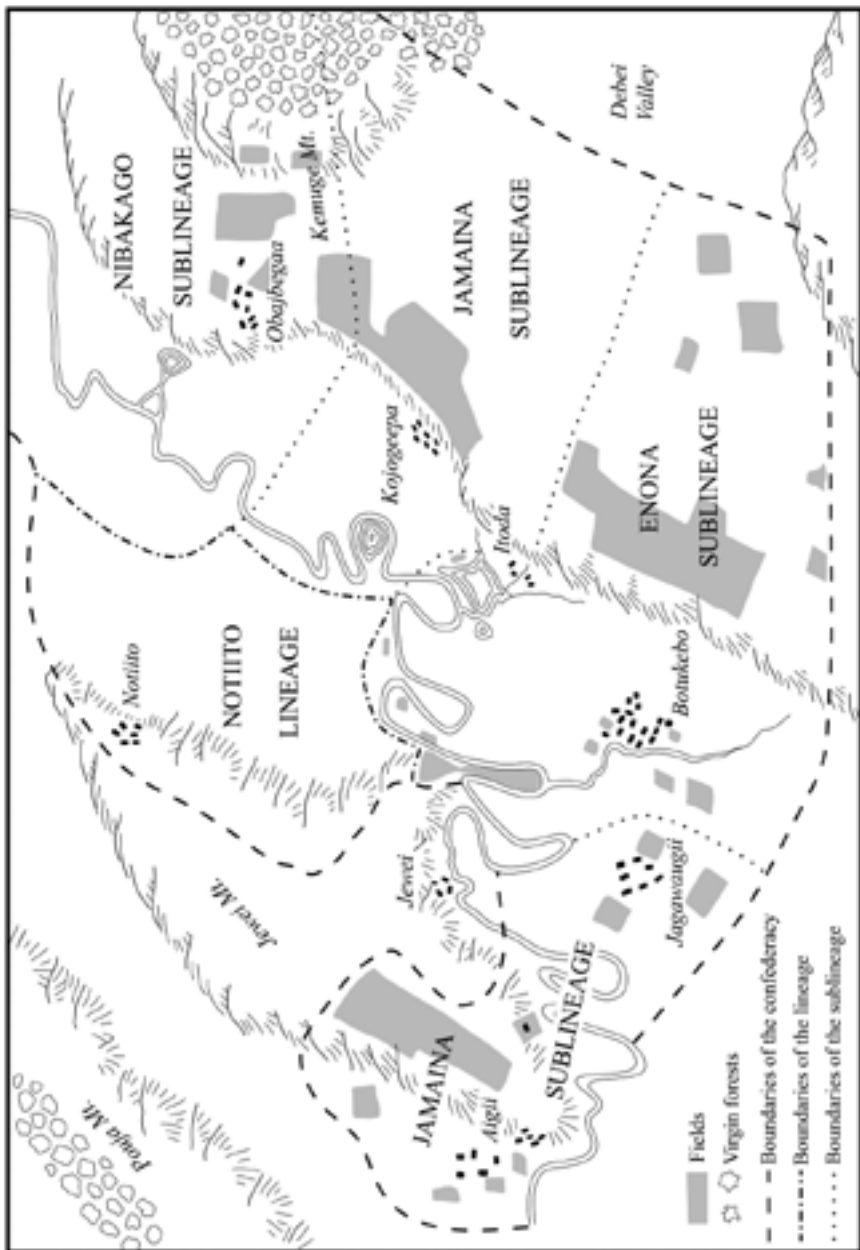
We understand that readers may be taken aback by the title of this book.

Anthropologists have been concerned for good reason and for quite some time about the power dynamics between anthropologists and their subjects, who traditionally were viewed as ‘the other.’ Already in 1983, in his seminal work *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian challenged the allochronistic approach of anthropology that presented anthropologists and their subjects as being from different ages or times. However, the potentially politically incorrect title of this book, which at the time of the author’s arrival situates the Kapauku in the Stone Age, has been kept for three reasons.

The first is that Leopold Pospíšil’s research took place almost seventy years ago. Anthropology’s ethnocentric emphasis on an evolutionary development from the Stone Age through the Bronze Age to the Iron Age was prevalent in scholarship and higher education at the time. Anthropology has come a long way since then, but the diary entries which form the basis for this book come from a time before such a shift in anthropology occurred.

The next reason is that when the author lived among the Kapauku, stone was indeed an essential piece of raw material — utilized for axe-blades, arrow-heads, and in cooking, just to mention a few of its uses. The importance of stone to the culture Pospíšil describes should not be discounted or underestimated.

Finally, we trust that readers of the book will quickly understand the author’s respect for the Kapauku and see that his comments about the Stone Age are usually tongue-in-cheek as he insists that the culture of the Kapauku was very often more sophisticated and advanced than those of the Western anthropologists’ observing them.



Map with local sublineages. (Scale: 1 : 50,000)

How I Became an Anthropologist

Since boyhood, I have been interested in nature: in animals, plants, stones, lightning — simply in the phenomena of the natural world that surrounded me. Later on I focused my attention on human biology, especially after having read Paul Kruif's *The Microbe Hunters*. I planned to be a physician and fantasized about becoming another Semmelweis or Robert Koch. My life and intentions radically changed with the occupation of my country, Czechoslovakia, by the Nazis in 1939. All Czech universities were closed, my father was taken away to the German concentration camps — Dachau and later Buchenwald — and thus another interest came to occupy my mind. I wanted to know how it was possible that my German friends, who came from good, usually Christian families, could become SS men, young men who before had played and skied with me and taught me their language. Now they would not hesitate a minute to kill me for the glory of Hitler and his Reich. Thus my other interest arose — in the social sciences and the study of social control. This interest was fortified by the involvement of non-Nazi intellectuals in Marxism-Leninism, a system as murderous and vicious (if not more so) than Nazism itself. My basic question was: How can decent and often well-educated people, indeed even scholars, be brainwashed into believing outdated and demonstrably false theories from the nineteenth century? I have studied these theories, always checking them against empirical facts, and regardless of who said what and how important and popular they were. I have always been interested in what actually and objectively existed out there, so that for me the only authority has been objective reality rather than the dogmatic -isms and proclamations and prophecies of commonly regarded “wise” men and women. In fact many of them have not appeared to me to be really wise.

In 1945, after the “liberation” of my country from Nazism, the safe return of my father from the German concentration camps (only to

be imprisoned a few years later by the communists), and the opening of the universities, my interest in biology re-emerged and prompted me to enrol in the medical school of my city of birth, and to study anatomy, biophysics, and biochemistry. However, with the ever-increasing influence of communism, with the Soviet Union and Stalin in the background, and the imprisonment of my father, this time by the illustrious followers of Marxist doctrine, my interest in social control and socio-psychological phenomena were again aroused. I quit the study of medicine and, of necessity, enrolled in the law school of Charles University of Prague — in the absence of any proper social science programs, this was the pursuit of knowledge closest to my interest. In 1948 I completed all the obligatory law courses; unfortunately, law was unable to answer all my burning questions and so I turned to philosophy, which I continued to study in Germany after my escape from Czechoslovakia following the communist takeover in 1948. I finally received my doctoral degree in law from my Czech alma mater, but not until the collapse of communism, in 1991.

Although philosophy showed me some interesting avenues of thought and taught me logic, it failed to provide me with unambiguous answers based on solid empirical evidence. So when I arrived in the United States I studied first economics and then sociology, receiving a bachelor's degree in the latter discipline. Again, however, I became dissatisfied, and this time I meandered into anthropology. Here, for the first time, I received answers to some of my inquiries, based upon cross-cultural empirical evidence. At last I had found a discipline that was neither arbitrarily limited to a single segment of culture (as are economics, sociology, political science, and psychology) nor ethnocentrically restricted to the study of Western Civilization. And so I became a student of anthropology in general, and comparative law in particular.

My professor H. G. Barnett at the University of Oregon first suggested that I should combine my past study of law with anthropology and write my master's thesis in that subject. This I did, accomplishing the task in 1952 by studying literature pertinent to the theory of law and legal and social control in fifty-five societies. In the summer of

that year I accepted an offer from Professor Edward Dozier to try my first field research among the Hopi-Tewa Indians of the Hano village of the First Mesa in Arizona. This research was brief, lasting about two months. I lived in the house of Faye Ayach, sharing my room in the pueblo with three other students and my wife. Although I had collected a heap of material on socio-political structure and social control, I did not dare to publish because of my ignorance of the language and the Tewa culture as a whole. Without these prerequisites, I knew I could not write anything definitive on the Hopi-Tewa culture. I did not want to join those anthropologists who published on people of whose language and whole culture they were ignorant. Rather, my examples were Bronislaw Malinowski and Clyde Kluckhohn. In his thorough study of the whole culture and language of the Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski introduced the participant-observer method. And Kluckhohn's long-term study of the Navajo Indians provided the very important dimension of time.

My first opportunity to carry out such a definitive study came at Yale University, where I had to decide on a culture and topic for my Ph.D. dissertation. By then I realized the shortcomings of the various theories of law, which were mostly speculative rather than based on solid cross-cultural evidence. So I wanted to design a cross-culturally valid theory of law based on solid fieldwork in several societies, complemented only by the necessary library research of the pertinent anthropological literature. These societies had to be at different evolutionary stages (hunters and gatherers, tribesmen, chieftainships, and civilized societies) and, as far as possible, unaffected by the influence of colonization. It had become clear to me that as their first task colonial governments destroy, of necessity, native legal systems by imposing their own law and "justice," and that my colleagues writing on such societies typically studied remnants of the aboriginal legal systems — some sort of "decomposed legal cadavers" — rather than viable systems of social control.

Thus my first choice was to go to the southern part of the Guianas or to the northern part of the Amazon Basin to study an isolated Indian tribe. However, my professor George Peter Murdock talked me

out of this scheme by pointing out that I would have to study another Western language (Portuguese) and travel many miles into the interior, while there were still unexposed societies in the eastern part of New Guinea, not far from the coast, where the official language of the colony was English. So I settled on New Guinea. I corresponded with Siegfried Nadel at the Australian National University, asking for advice and possible support. His answer was not satisfactory to me: there would be support, but I would have to get my Ph.D. at his university. Then I had a stroke of luck. During the spring semester of 1954 at Yale there was in our department a visiting professor from Utrecht University, Theodore Fischer. He and Professor Murdock recommended I do my research in the western part of New Guinea (then a Dutch colony) that had the anthropology professor Jan Van Baal as its governor. In subsequent correspondence he expressed interest in my project and promised support and permission to conduct my research in "an uncontrolled territory," a place where most of the people had never seen a white man. This was a very exciting offer, and I accepted the invitation immediately.

In September 1954 I left New Haven by train to Oregon, where I stopped to visit my parents. From Portland I flew to Hawaii and, after having spent several days there visiting friends, flew via Canton Island and Fiji to Sydney, Australia. There I stayed for six days with my old Czechoslovak friend Jaroslav Latal and, while visiting Sydney University, made the acquaintance of professors Adolphus Peter Elkin and Arthur Capell. From Sydney I flew to the international airport on the island of Biak, part of Dutch New Guinea. From a propeller plane, the sight of the island where I planned to spend about one and a half years of my life impressed me. Flying from the south at an elevation of about fifteen thousand feet we flew over the central mountain chain of New Guinea, which rose from sea level in one heave to a peak of over sixteen thousand feet (Carstenz Toppen) towering above us on the east. This gigantic rocky "frozen wave," covered with an uninterrupted green carpet of tropical rain and mountain moss forests, would be my new home for the duration of my research. After crossing the highlands we descended over the immense forested plains of the

northern part of New Guinea, bisected by silvery ribbons of rivers, half covered by the overhanging canopy of the endless tropical rain forest. From above, these plains showed no evidence of human habitation.

We landed on the raised coral island of Biak. I took a room in a simple but clean and comfortable KLM hotel located next to the airport. During my brief stay on Biak I had an exciting encounter with a waterspout, a sort of a small tornado rotating over the sea. It approached while I was lying in a sling chair on the beach near the hotel. Its rotating funnel was picking up water, lifting it into an overhanging black cloud from which it was raining back onto the sea. I wondered whether I, too, was about to be lifted, but my sling chair neighbour assured me that there was no danger, that the waterspout would disintegrate as soon as it hit the nearby coral reef. I took several pictures of the waterspout as I prepared to run for my life. And then, over the outlying coral reef, the spout disintegrated and collapsed in a spectacular cascade of colourful, glittering water drops magically illuminated by the late afternoon tropical sun.

After several days of exploring the local beaches, an old U.S. World War II airport overgrown by jungle, and rusting, crippled vehicles and landing crafts along with a downed airplane in a lagoon, I flew in an old Dakota plane to Hollandia, then the capital of the Dutch colony. There I moved to the government hotel, located next to the governor's residence in Hollandia Binnen. The accommodation was excellent. I had a room, a shower, and a terrace facing the adjoining jungle, and at six o'clock each morning hot tea was served. I shared the terrace with an Australian businessman. This arrangement was fortunate for me for several reasons. The Australian gentleman acquainted me with the life and bureaucratic procedures of the Dutch administration, along with all the local gossip. On one occasion he proved very helpful. When we were having our six o'clock tea a large venomous snake slithered out from the jungle and studied our appearance with great interest. Somehow I was more appealing than my acquaintance, and so it slid menacingly within striking distance from me. "Don't move," ordered the Australian, then screamed some words in Malay and assured me that help would be coming. Meanwhile the

snake and I watched each other. I recalled John Wayne spitting into the eyes of a coiled rattlesnake and readied myself to employ the same trick. The only trouble was that I had no experience of spitting at snakes or, for that matter, at anybody or anything. So instead of using Wayne's remedy I just stared and sweated. Finally a Kanaka, a local coastal Papuan, appeared with a machete and slowly moved behind the snake. Then with a swish of steel the snake collapsed and my ordeal was over. Without the Australian's help and the Kanaka's skill, my acquaintance would have probably had to share his tea with the snake.

After two days of waiting for an appointment with the governor I decided to try to see him without the normal protocol. I walked to the governor's mansion, the former residence of General MacArthur, passed the sentry with little difficulty, and climbed up the veranda steps. Suddenly the door to the interior of the house opened and two gentlemen stepped outside, followed by a man in a dressing gown. Here was Governor Van Baal. After saying good-bye to his visitors he turned to me and asked: "And who might you be?" I introduced myself as a student of Professors Murdock and Fischer, who supposedly had written to the governor about my arrival. The governor admitted that he was surprised I had not been shot by the sentry and remarked that probably all successful political assassins in history got close to their noble victims. After this observation he kindly told me to come to his house at the same time tomorrow, and that now he would like to finish shaving. Thus I succeeded in making a swift appointment without being shot.

The next day the governor seemed transformed. Properly dressed and very cordial, he not only granted me permission to study a group of unpacified Papuans who had never seen a white man, but introduced me to a young anthropologist, Van den Leeden, whose job it was to acquaint me with local conditions, help me with purchasing equipment, and introduce me to important members of the administration and other individuals who might help me with my fieldwork. He himself, having just finished work among the coastal Papuans of the Sarmi region, proved to be an invaluable adviser in my research. Thus I met the legendary Victor de Bruijn, an experienced Dutch administrator

known for his brave fight against the Japanese during World War II. At that time he was “kontroleur” in charge of the administration of the Wissell Lakes area, a region occupied by the Kapauku around the three lakes Paniai, Tigi, and Tage. The lakes were discovered by a pilot named Wissell who flew over them in 1937. The outbreak of war surprised de Bruijn there, so he decided to fight behind the Japanese lines with a bunch of Kapauku warriors. These exploits earned him the title “Jungle Pimpernel,” and a book of the same title was published about his experiences.

For my research area de Bruijn suggested two central mountain areas which would suit my purposes: the Grand Baliem Valley, recently “opened” by some missionaries, and the unmapped and unpacified Kamu Valley, a part of the Kapauku territory to the southwest of the three lakes that had not yet been brought under governmental control. My advisors were in favor of the Dani tribe because, they claimed, they were more formally organized and had an established headmanship, while the Kapauku were believed to be so egalitarian that they lacked any kind of leadership, and therefore also law. Since I did not believe in any truly egalitarian and leaderless society, the Kapauku would be a challenge and I made my decision. This choice had one great advantage: in Enarotali on the Paniai Lake, the only Dutch administrative outpost in the interior of western Dutch New Guinea in 1954, Marion Doble was stationed. Doble was an American missionary who, having had training in the Summer School of Linguistics, had succeeded in analyzing the Kapauku-Paniai dialect and written a dictionary of about two thousand words and a grammar of the language (1953). In previous correspondence she had assured me of her help with learning the complicated Kapauku language. Although the people in Hollandia advised me to learn Malay, an easy language, and take with me a Paniai Kapauku as an interpreter, claiming that I would never learn the Kapauku language, I decided otherwise. If a three-year-old could learn the language, I reasoned, so could I.

My fourteen-day stay in Hollandia was made very pleasant for me by Governor Van Baal. Not only did he provide me with advisors and access to supplies from the government store, he also loaned his chauff-

four and car to help me with these purchases and my visits to various administration officials. This generous loan, in one instance, resulted in a memorable a comedy of errors. One afternoon when I was swimming in Sentani Lake the governor's chauffeur appeared with his black limousine flying the governor's flag, informing me that I had been invited to a dance and reception for the captain and crew of a Dutch warship, at a restaurant on the pier in Hollandia harbour. I was to go to my hotel, change into formal dark dress attire loaned by the governor, and be driven to the pier for the festivities. There, to my surprise, the crew and the captain of the ship were lined up with the inevitable brass band, awaiting the arrival of the governor. As my car, flying the governor's flag, moved past the row of military personnel, the brass band started to play. Everybody saluted me, obviously mistaking me for the governor. Out of courtesy I responded with a salute. The car stopped in front of the captain, who was startled to see a new young governor unknown to him step out of the official car. The bandleader, also shocked, hesitantly stopped swinging his baton, while the puzzled musicians, one by one, slowly muted their instruments. Some of the guests broke into laughter; while the captain and I, trying to maintain propriety and decorum, shook hands. It was then that I introduced myself as a Yale student. I think the greatest "kick" (as he said) of the incident was had by the governor, who later even toasted me on my "promotion."

Purchases made, official and unofficial visits completed, and full of advice, I finally departed by plane to the island of Biak. Two days later I boarded a World War II amphibious plane, a Catalina, and started my journey to the highland country of my research. After a brief stop on Japen Island to deliver some people and goods, we flew into the interior of New Guinea. The flight was fascinating. To look down upon the "sea" of the tropical rain forest with its meandering silver ribbons of glittering rivers, the green vastness broken occasionally by a red blooming tree or a white heron gliding over the canopy, was certainly the experience of my life. It was extraordinary to think that all this country was still unexplored, with people living in it who had not yet experienced the blessings as well as the ecological devasta-

tion that Western civilization brings with it. In fact, my elation at nature's beauty was punctured periodically by the mental image of the future devastation civilization would exact on this virgin paradise. Humanity's greed and short-sightedness would certainly cut down those forests, destroy the habitat of exotic fauna with its marsupials and birds of paradise, expose the natives to the ravages of introduced diseases and exploitation, and destroy their culture, especially their political and legal structures and religion.

I was jolted from my daydreams by the fast approach of the foothills and mountain chains of the Central Highlands, with their towering peaks and razor-sharp tree-clad ridges. On the horizon to the east were the blue walls of the massif, which rises to the glacier-covered Carstenz Toppen, the highest mountain in the Pacific (nearly 16,500 feet). The weather was splendid, and small cumulus clouds floated beneath and around us. As we passed one mountain crest there appeared below us three huge lakes glittering like diamonds and sapphires set between the green cliffs and forest-covered mountains. We started to descend upon the northernmost and largest lake, Paniai. In the early anthropological accounts the lake's name was falsely attributed to the then mysterious inhabitants of this highland region. The mistake originated with some explorers of the southern coast of New Guinea who, being ignorant of the local language, pointed to the mountains and asked who lived there. The coastal Papuans, not understanding the question, indicated the most spectacular feature of the mountain: the huge lake. In this way, the mysterious inland dwellers became the "Paniai mountain pygmies." As it turned out Paniai was neither the name of the people nor the mountain, but a lake; and the people, who were over five-foot tall, were not pygmies.

After landing smoothly on the lake we cruised to the pier of the village of Enarotali and anchored the plane about 200 feet offshore. A motorboat with two uniformed officials set out from the pier to meet us and took us ashore. One of them was Raphael Den Haan, the district officer of the Paniai region. He addressed me in French, and so I, assuming he spoke no English, replied in the same language as best as I could. We talked about the flight and my research. Finally Den Haan

asked me, "But you are not French?" This was the biggest compliment I have ever received concerning my proficiency in French. When I apprised him of the fact that I am an American citizen of Czech origin he switched to perfect English.

At the pier, another surprise awaited me. A row of people awaited our arrival. Most were local natives, some were Dutch officials, and among them was Marion Doble. From our correspondence I had pictured her as an elderly unmarried woman. To my amazement there stood instead a most attractive smiling young blonde dressed in white and pink as though she were about to attend a Sunday church service. This was not the only surprise. I received a real shock as I looked more closely at the rest of the group. Next to this beautiful, smartly dressed young woman stood a row of natives in their local costumes, the women bare-breasted with a garment consisting of a strip of bark that passed between their thighs and tucked behind and under a belt. Their buttocks were fully exposed. The males were completely naked except for a belt holding an orange bottle gourd, a penis sheath, surmounted by a kangaroo fur stopper and held in an upright position by an orange belt. They gave the impression of all having a magnificent erection. The contrast between Marion Doble and these Kapauku, the first I had ever seen, was so stark that I lowered my eyes and did not dare look up again. As the amused Miss Doble explained to me later, "It was quite a sight to see an adult man blush." My entrance into Kapauku society was certainly not heroic.

Not everything went wrong on my arrival. I made such a good impression on the district officer that he invited me to stay in his house as his guest. His residence stood on a hill overlooking the large lake, swamps, forest-covered mountains, and a Dutch village with a picturesque Catholic church. The interior of the house was very well designed, comfortable and well furnished. The drawing room was equipped with an excellent and well-stocked bar. There were constant visitors to the place, so I could certainly not complain of boredom. Den Haan made it his business to introduce me to the local residents, especially the physician and his nurse who ran a small hospital, the parish Catholic priest of the Franciscan order, the manager of the gov-

ernment shop, and Mr. Post, the head of the Protestant missionaries of the American Mission Alliance. Mr. Post and Marion Doble invited me to several dinners, so that during my short stay I became acquainted with most of the mission personnel.

While waiting to trek into the unchartered territory of the Tago Lake region and beyond, I had an interesting opportunity to witness the trial by the Dutch government of an elderly Kapauku woman accused of murdering a child. The charge was serious indeed. The woman had allegedly killed a four-year-old boy, and subsequently eaten the body. So it seemed that I was going to study cannibals. This was another surprise for me. A young government official translated the court proceedings for me so I could follow the arguments. The accusers and witnesses were very specific in their statements and extended testimonies. The accused woman sat still, her head lowered. She did not speak at all and did not object to the charges. After the hearings were concluded the district officer decided that the evidence, although quite solid, was still inconclusive. He explained to me that in similar cases the testimonies, although well-delivered and convincing as to their accuracy, were subsequently proven to be biased and based at least partially on personal prejudice. No matter what the actual outcome, however, the charge of cannibalism was certainly a serious matter.

So, it looked like I would be studying cannibals for about one and a half years, which I did not find to be an encouraging prospect. I surveyed my physique in the mirror and concluded that since I was rather skinny, I would not be considered appetizing. I recalled that even sharks preferred fat seals and sea lions to skinny sailors and swimmers. Also, it was likely that the cannibals focused on their traditional enemies. However, this knowledge of cannibalism did not invoke any fear with me. As strange as it may appear to the reader, I was not afraid or worried of what would happen to me if I were killed. Indeed, I was not even afraid of death.

This lack of fear dated back to my childhood when, at the age of five, I was afflicted with appendicitis which ultimately burst causing peritonitis. It was 1928 when there was no penicillin or other antibiotics

to help me recover. The hospital believed I was doomed and advised my parents that my case was hopeless. My father refused to accept this verdict, boarded his private plane and flew to a summer resort where he unceremoniously picked up my vacationing uncle Robert Pospíšil, M.D. who was a well-known surgeon. Together they flew to my native town, where my uncle operated on me in his sanatorium at eight o'clock in the evening. He had to flush out of my abdomen the mess my treacherous intestine had produced. During the operation, he discovered that the cause of my appendicitis was tuberculosis of my abdominal glands, which he removed. During these operations my heart stopped and I had a strange dream that haunted me afterwards but later fortified me for the rest of my life. I dreamed I was running on a parquet floor with cracks big enough for me to fall though into a fiery glow beneath. In front of me was a brilliant golden light which I was trying to reach. Suddenly, my feet left the floor and I floated into the embrace of the golden light. What a marvellous experience! Though I survived the operation, my abdomen remained open for several months. During the first five weeks, it had to be opened and cleaned every afternoon around four o'clock. What I dreaded most was the closing of the wound with spiked clamps due to the intense pain it produced.

The aftermath of this childhood experience was a relative tolerance of pain, no fear of death, and a deep scar in my abdomen which proved to be most helpful in my New Guinea research, as I will explain later. My lack of fear of death was most helpful during my resistance to Nazism and its brutality, which sent my father to the concentration camps of Dachau and Buchenwald and three of my uncles to the various "accommodations" of the Gestapo. Beside such experiences, of course, made my initial stay in the strange "Stone Age" of the Kapauku Papuanas was not only bearable, but actually very pleasant and exciting.

After ten days at Enarotali, my leisure period ended. The district officer introduced me to some natives and helped me organize my party. He also suggested the southern and southwestern parts of the uncontrolled Kamu Valley as the most promising areas for my study.

My communication with the natives was most rudimentary. During my brief stay at the lake I was able to stutter a few of the most common words and sentences in the Kapauku language. There were, of course, no interpreters and no Pidgin English as lingua franca. Thus the sentence of most importance for my immediate future and survival was “Kapauku maa mana?” — “How do you say it in Kapauku?” With such stellar linguistic skills, and with supplies, porters, and a police patrol composed of native constabulary provided by the district officer, I left Enarotali by motor boat. Unfortunately the pleasant voyage did not last long. After going down the Jawei River in a southerly direction for a few miles, we had to leave the boat at a place called Udateida and start our long trip overland.

At the end of the first day we reached Waghete village on Tigi Lake, the seat of one Mr. Lawrence, the Dutch police commander of the newly “opened” area. I stayed in his house for one day. The next day, Lawrence led our expedition across the huge lake in boats. We arrived at the entrance to the mountainous Debei Valley, a region traditionally hostile to intruders. As I had been told, Dutch expeditions had been attacked and turned back, and even a Japanese platoon that succeeded in penetrating it during the Second World War had been massacred.

As we proceeded through the valley the local natives learned about a very strange white man who was coming to live with them and who, oddly enough, was neither a missionary nor a policeman. He was not coming to teach them any new religion or customs, nor was he going to force any of the white man’s laws upon them. On the contrary, he claimed that he intended to learn their language and study their way of life. Although many of the natives were suspicious of these strange assertions (communicated to them by a native who spoke Malay and had learned about my research from the Dutch administration), they became interested in my project. The first confrontation with the Debei people occurred not far from the entrance to the valley. Suddenly we were surrounded by about two hundred warriors. In front of us, on a hill, stood the headman of the local political unit. With one interpreter (Kapauku-Malay), Mr. Lawrence started to climb the slope.

I took his picture. At the time I feared it would be my last one. When we reached the top of the hill the headman — still sporting Japanese epaulettes that testified to his war exploits — received us. Mr. Lawrence engaged him in conversation for half a day and was quite successful. He convinced our “host” that I posed no threat to them and their political freedom. I showed the headman a book I was carrying with me into the field (the British “Notes and Queries” Committee of RAI, 1951) to demonstrate what my future work on Kapauku culture would look like. The headman agreed to our free passage through his territory but warned us that their neighbours to the west, another Kapauku political confederacy of lineages, were really dangerous. To protect us, he persuaded about fifty of his followers, armed with bows and arrows, to join our procession.

During our passage through the Debei Valley such discussions and arrangements were repeated each time we entered another political territory. At the outset our party numbered about forty individuals (including carriers and native constabulary). As we continued more and more natives joined us for our “protection,” so that by the time we entered the low-lying Kamu Valley (about 4,300 feet above the sea level) from the lofty threshold of the Debei Valley (about 6,000 feet above the sea level) my native following numbered well over three hundred people.

In this way, the trip through the traditionally hostile Debei Valley proved to be quite peaceful. Walking through the jungle on a narrow winding path was another matter, however. The ground was soft, usually with ankle-deep mud, traversed periodically by slippery tree roots that made me slide sideways. How I appreciated my heavy Australian army boots with their copper studs, which kept me from losing my footing and rolling in the mud! Indeed, my journey well befitted the title of Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau’s film *The Sky Above — the Mud Below*. Above me were tall trees and the canopy of the tropical forest. Making our trip less monotonous were native “bridges” over streams in deep ravines, which we crossed by balancing often on a single pole, without the luxury of a railing. These crossings resembled more of a circus tightrope act than a forest trek. We also waded through

swamps, often knee deep in mud and water, steadying ourselves on poles. Sometimes I preferred to simply swim.

Finally, on the third day, we stood at the end of the Debei Valley, about 1,500 feet above the low-lying Kamu, a huge dried-out (naturally drained) lake bed with the Jewei Mountain rising in the middle. It was a magnificent sight, enhanced by my three days of claustrophobia in the jungle. The vastness of the valley floor below me, the magnificent mountains reaching into the clouds, the savanna and reed-covered valley flats, and the verdure of the surrounding tropical rain forests around me was simply overwhelming. That such beauty could exist in our “developed world” was beyond my comprehension.

After a few minutes of silence as I took in the beauty, I began to think about what the “civilized” world would eventually bring to this paradise: mountain slopes denuded of forests by Japanese lumber companies and turned into a tropical desert; the swampy lake bed and the savanna carved into rice paddies and traversed by paved roads; smoke and toxic fumes emitted from industrial enterprises and tractors; the crystal-clear streams polluted by human and industrial waste; and the introduction of malaria and an additional assortment of white man’s and Asiatic bacteria. I finally managed to shake off these mental images and concentrate on the glorious present. It was 23 November 1954.

As I gazed from my lofty perch over the expanse of the Kamu Valley my first intuition was to cross it and settle in the villages I could see faintly in the south-west. My escorts informed me that these were the villages of Bibigi, Degeipige and Ginopigi. However, as we descended to the valley floor the natives of the first village we entered, Botukebo, persuaded me to change my plan and stay in their territory. They staged a great welcoming party during which they presented me with a pig. On the advice of Mr. Lawrence I immediately reciprocated with a gift of several steel axes. The people, led by the young headman of the village of Aigii, Jokagaibo, offered me a nice piece of land called Itoda (Kapauku meaning: place of sand), through which ran a creek with clear, ice cold water that was safe to drink without any purification. The creek originated from a mountain cliff some distance back in the jungle at the foot of the Kemuge Mountain, which towered over

the place. What better place could I have wished to settle in? I accepted the headman's generous offer, and with the help of the police I pitched my tent and unloaded my supplies.

Slowly a crowd of several hundred of people gathered around the place, all watching my every move. To them, each tiny item of my supplies was a treasure, especially my used Gillette razor blades. On the morning of the second day the police and the natives started to clear the ground in preparation for my future house. With the help of machetes provided by the police, they tore at the groundcover, exposing a beautiful alluvial layer of yellow sand. While this was going on, many native men and children approached me in order to subject me to closer scrutiny. A couple of courageous fellows even touched my cheeks to find out whether I was painted or not. Once they were convinced I was not, they concluded that I was immortal. Why? To them this conclusion was empirical and logical. The only pinkish white animals they knew in their environment were crayfish that had recently shed their dark, hard skin. This rejuvenation cycle was thought to go on indefinitely — proof that the animal was immortal. Because the crayfish were intensively fished, the Kapauku never had the opportunity to see any of them die naturally. So, by analogy, these notions were applied to me. When I objected, they refused to believe that the white man was mortal. They maintained that in the past I had gone through cycles similar to the crayfish. Later on this idea was “empirically” confirmed when my body, exposed to the tropical sun, slowly acquired a deeper and deeper tan. “You see”, they exclaimed, “you lied to us! You are now getting dark like us (I did indeed tan a deep bronze) and then you will shed your dark skin like the crayfish and start the process over again.” This contention and my “lying” was proven a couple weeks later, when my skin started to peel. The people assured me, however, that they did not think of me as a bad man because of my “lying.” I was simply being modest, not wanting to flaunt my superiority. At that time I wished my wife were there to hear this evaluation. She has always been aware of my status as a flawed mortal.

What slowly started to unnerve me was that I was constantly the center of everybody's attention. Every move I made was carefully

watched, and if I wanted to open a can and bent over it, I soon had at least ten natives bending over it with me. The initial native shyness diminished remarkably after I appeared in shorts and without a shirt. Although my clothes scared them at first, the people could see that the body underneath was built like theirs, with a proper belly button in the right place. One thing, however, aroused excitement and brought me immediate prestige: the deep scar on my abdomen, a relic of my uncle-surgeon's operation to remove my appendix. Because there were no antibiotics in the twenties, my abdomen had to be kept open for antiseptic purposes for about half a year, causing a large, deep, depressed scar. Not knowing anything about surgery, the people attributed my scar to combat and I became immediately not only *jape uu*, a war hero, but also some sort of superman. No Kapauku could survive such a stab in the belly. Not conversant in the language, and thus ignorant of their interpretation of the reason for my scar, for several months I enjoyed the highest reputation as a macho man. Appearing to them to be very rich and physically tough and brave, I was given their highest honorary title of *ibo* (big) and *ibome* (big man or "big shot"). After they learned that I was American, I became known far and wide as *Americaibo* — something like a big shot from America. For practical reasons I did not object to such a distinction.

On my first day, however, the people's reaction to me had one undesired effect: the terrific hollering and screaming of hundreds of culturally extroverted Kapauku. This noise and the omnipresent multitude rendered me completely exhausted that first day, and in the evening I collapsed into a deep sleep in my tent. The next morning at about six o'clock I woke up and with apprehension listened for the presence of the multitude. Absolute quiet and the chirping of birds in the forest enveloped the tent. Finally alone, with the people dispersed to their close and distant villages, I could relax and wash and shave myself in the brook in much appreciated solitude. I picked up my toilet supplies, opened the tent, and stepped out into what I expected to be a glorious day. But there, in front of my tent in a large semicircle, five hundred people sat in complete silence, their eyes glued to the entrance. The minute I stepped outside, noise and screaming and yelling erupted like

a salvo. While I washed and shaved, hundreds of pairs of eyes stared at me from every quarter. It seemed that the entire jungle around me was alive.

As the days passed, the people continued to follow me about, constantly surrounding me. At least ten of them tried to teach me Kapauku words for different objects — all, of course, at the same time. The direst moment came when I had to use the toilet. I tried to disappear in the bush, but a procession followed me. Finally, in desperation and acute discomfort, I screamed and swung my arms at them, trying to make it clear that they should leave me in peace. In order not to antagonize them, I tried to laugh at the same time. They laughed back at me — but they did retreat! From then on I used this technique any time I needed compliance with an order or suggestion that the natives were reluctant to follow. As a matter of fact, this also worked marvelously with my students at Yale: castigate and smile at the same time.

The people's reactions to the various items I had brought along with me were varied and often surprising. They placed great value not on clothes but on blankets. The smell of my aftershave frightened them at first, but later some said *ena* (good, nice), while others maintained their aversion. My little toy teddy bear elicited amazement and, after some tentative touching, lots of laughter. Similarly my magazine pictures were a great success. Above all, they admired pictures of animals that were familiar to them (especially birds); they could not comprehend my picture of a horse. No one commented on the beauty of the cover girls on these magazines, though they did show interest in their clothes. To my surprise, my harmonica failed to impress them, whereas when I played on my comb covered with paper, I was quite a success, especially when I produced high-pitched tones.

During my initial contact I tried to be cool toward people who overeagerly offered advice and help, remembering Professor Barnett's warning that most likely such people were misfits in their own culture, trying to compensate by attaching themselves to a foreigner. Indeed, one of two such Kapauku proved to be a generally disliked man, while the other, Ijaaj Bunaibomuuma, was a recidivist criminal who later in my stay was tried for his life. I filmed the trial.

The real adventure for me started with the departure of Mr. Lawrence and his police escort on 27 November, leaving me with one policeman named Darobo. We had just begun the daunting task of building a solid house as headquarters for my research. It was to stand on the place given to me and called Itoda, between the villages of Botukebo and Kojogeepa. Its location outside of a village and on a main trade route proved most advantageous. It permitted me to live close to Kapauku communities while minimizing the disturbing influence my arrival and presence might have had upon the village life of the natives. It also prevented my identification with any one single village, thus allowing informants from other villages and, thanks to the trade route, even those from other political confederacies or lineages — as well as free access to my house. At the same time the proximity of the village of Botukebo permitted close and continuous observation of the life of its inhabitants.

We started to build my house on 25 November. I drew up a plan of a square house with a three-foot elevated floor for sanitary reasons and as protection from crawling insects and reptiles. I drew two windows, a door, and a partial partition that created the effect of two rooms. Behind the partition I constructed a bed. Since this was made of thin, crude poles, offering what only a most imaginative individual would call comfort, I called it “the bed of Procrustes.”

The floor was made of large poles with gaps between them so that sweeping it was an easy task indeed; all the dirt simply fell underneath the house, where it was scraped away once a month. A gabled roof topped the four walls. The roof was made of hewn planks, provided by the villagers. They labored fantastically on the construction. Adolescent boys brought freshly cut poles from the jungle, stripped nicely of their bark, and a Papuan even donated the entirety of his old house, whose planks were freshly shaved by natives with their stone maumi axes and the steel axes supplied by us. Of course I reciprocated the gift with counter-offerings of axes, machetes, and knives.

The work proceeded satisfactorily. Although I had to wait until 5 December for nails to arrive from Enarotali by special courier, we

proceeded with construction. The natives lashed poles and planks together with steel-like rattan vines. As it turned out, this lashing was the bond that held my house together for seven months, by which point the nails had rusted away. On 5 December we finished the frame and the walls, on the next day the door, one window, and the internal partition. On 8 December the floor and the second window were completed. And on 9 December the roof was installed, although later it had to be covered with a layer of oak bark weighted down by a mesh of poles lashed together in order to make it watertight and to prevent *toto*, “dripping holes,” which appeared later anyway and had to be sealed periodically.

While working on the building, we had to climb up onto the ridge pole, rafters, and horizontal beams. The boys climbed the perpendicular poles while I, with my training at the Czechoslovak Sokol gymnastic organization, jumped up, grasped a horizontal beam, and swung my legs up over it in a couple of seconds. The boys screamed in surprise and enthusiastically tried to imitate my gymnastics. The result was almost a catastrophe. With five or more of the boys swinging on a pole simultaneously, the whole structure bent dangerously, threatening to collapse. I had to stop this performance. The natives, however, were so taken by the elegance of the swings and turnovers on the beams that the very next day they erected a horizontal bar next to my house, on which the Papuans began diligently practicing. Periodic outbursts of laughter came from onlooking girls when an unfortunate boy broke his koteka gourd penis sheath on the bar. The embarrassed athlete jumped down and swiftly disappeared in the reeds, wherefrom he shouted for help. His friends supplied him with a new genital cover in his hideout. In a couple of days an enterprising Kapauku entrepreneur appeared with a large supply of gourds, selling these to the gymnasts in need. I eventually ruined his business by supplying the boys with shorts. I showed them other tricks, so that in about fourteen days there was something like a Papuan gymnastics team surrounding my house, exercising on bars, throwing spears (there were no spears prior to my arrival), playing team games, and pulling on poles. I was even able to film the first

headstand, handstand, and somersault ever made in the interior of New Guinea, possibly even on the entire island.

To complete my habitat I added four structures to my house: a chicken coop, fireplace, toilet, and garden. Since I had received two chickens from the district officer, bought another from the local people, and then added a handsome rooster, the natives built a chicken house for me. This was on 16 December. Although the coop was quite attractive, some of the birds preferred to roost in a shrub nearby. Even worse, they laid their eggs in the jungle and the boys had to look for their nests. Sometimes there were more than fifteen eggs in the same place. Many boys and adults reproached me for eating eggs, claiming that it was a bad business not to give the birds in the eggs a chance to hatch and enjoy life. They themselves used the adult birds only for meat and feathers. The latter use became a problem. In order to keep my chickens and rooster, I had to feed them sweet potatoes every morning and evening. At sunset I would stand in front of my house and produce, with my pursed lips, a shrill purring sound and the fowl would come flying out of the jungle to get their food. The rooster would usually emerge from the forest, descending from the steep mountain slopes, spiralling down to me, his magnificent metallic-coloured plumage glittering in the rays of the setting sun. One evening, however, his arrival was not as spectacular as usual. To my horror I found that his beautiful tail feathers had been plucked. The culprit was a boy whom I later named Robertus (the natives pronounced it as Gubeeni); he had used the feathers to make a headdress for himself. I castigated him severely and put a halt to the plucking practice as far as my birds were concerned.

Since we had to search constantly for the egg nests in the jungle, I decided to use an old trick from my native country to induce the chickens to lay eggs in the same place. In my house I blew out six eggs, consumed the contents and filled the empty eggshells with sand, sealing the two apertures with wax. Then I lined up the final products on a shelf above my desk. When I had time, I would place them in the nests and remove the real eggs. The chickens would not know the difference and would come to lay eggs in the same place.

While I was contemplating all this, in came one of my boys, named Ogiibijokaimopaj, and admired my products, not knowing they were not real eggs. He asked me whether he could have one. Having lived in this place for three months, I was able to speak some Kapauku, and was familiar with the natives' penchant for playing practical jokes. I generously replied, "Take all of them, if you wish." "Nagajaawege," he thanked profusely, and took the eggs and went home. The next day many young boys and other villagers came to my house, laughing and telling me that I was quite a clever trickster. They told me that Ogiibijokaimopaj had invited some of them for an egg feast (by that time the people were already imitating me and enjoyed eating eggs), where he planned to roast the eggs in red-hot ashes. Once they broke the shells and discovered the sand, they realized the joke. They went from house to house, laughing and telling about their unfortunate host and this new kind of trick. Ogiibijokaimopaj was not offended or even annoyed, as we Westerners would have been. As a good Kapauku he laughed along with his guests and upon seeing me, slapped my back, declaring, "It was a good trick. You got me this time, I'll get you next."

In order to heat my house at night, when the temperature routinely dropped into single digits on the Centigrade scale, and as a means of cooking, I decided to build a fireplace. Of course I had neither bricks nor mortar. I decided to use large flat stones instead of bricks, and clay mixed with sand, dried moss, and straw as mortar. A crew of boys and young men rolled large stones and even boulders down the mountainside. This activity provided lots of excitement as the rocks rolled down through the jungle and shrubs, tearing down smaller trees and branches and leaving trails in the greenery on the slope. I proceeded to build the fireplace chamber onto the outside of the house, using huge rocks covered by large flat stones. At the end of this megalithic structure, away from the house wall, I built a more or less square chimney of smaller stones. The clay mortar worked fine and held the structure together. Amazingly, even the heavy rains did not dissolve my achievement, which the Kapauku called *mogo owa* (the stone house). The whole construction was finished by 29 December, in twelve days. It proved magnificent, keeping me warm in the eve-

nings, providing a place to cook my meals, and giving my new home a coziness and distinction.

To provide me with regular fresh food the boys made a garden nearby my house and fenced it in. I cultivated vegetables that were rarely grown by the natives or quite unknown to them: onions, cucumbers, melons, two kinds of tomatoes, American multicolored corn, string beans, chili peppers, and Irish potatoes. I also tried cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and kale, but these plants were rapidly devoured by ochre-colored beetles, in spite of our efforts to eradicate them. In addition to these introduced crops (seeds I received from my parents in Oregon), the natives planted some types of marrow, bottle gourds, and ginger. Later I used ginger roots for trade with the Paniai Lake residents in exchange for imported goods. Of course the people were keen on tasting my strange vegetables. All except one were received with enthusiasm. Corn had the greatest success, spreading from my seeds across the Kamu Valley and beyond. One year later I found fields of it in the Pona Valley, which to my knowledge I was the first white man to enter.

The only failure proved to be the tomato. People had no use for them until an incident gave the plant a new function. Once while I was weeding my garden, my “adopted” native boys were playing a war game nearby, hitting each other with balls of mud. One of the missiles missed its target and hit me in the back. Being the retaliatory type, I grabbed the first projectile I could find, a ripe red tomato hanging next to my face, and with beautiful accuracy hit one of the boys in the middle of his forehead. The tomato splashed magnificently, covering the warrior with red juice and yellow seeds. Seeing this fabulous effect the boys screamed with delight. They instantly invaded my tomato patch and engaged me and the other group in an all-out tomato fight. At first I was apprehensive about the prospect of losing my entire crop, but after receiving several spectacular hits I succumbed to the boys’ enthusiasm and helped them finish off my tomato inventory. Objectively speaking, tomatoes were far superior to mud balls in this war game. There could be no stones hidden inside, and they splashed so extraordinarily over the warriors’ naked bodies, an effect no mud

ball could produce. One lucky and unexpected outcome of our battle was that the splashed tomato seeds eventually sprouted and grew in the reeds and the adjoining jungle, wherever the stray or inaccurate missiles had landed. In two months, tomato fighting around my house became a favourite pastime of the younger generation. This was my first contribution to the native culture.

Other additions to my food supply grew outside my house. One was a bush with fruits that resembled giant lemons, larger than grapefruits. The juice, however, was disappointing, tasting like something between a lemon and grapefruit. The fruit had lots of white pulp, which the people ate together with the juicy flesh. Another citrus fruit cultivated by the natives was called *mukwa*. It was the shape and size of a large lime, but its skin had a rich yellow colour when ripe. The juice was excellent, superior to our limes and lemons. I used to squeeze one daily, sweetened with sugar. What a treat it was to have plenty of ice-cold fruit juice in this tropical jungle! Another natural food source was a banana grove that the people planted for me on the southern side of my house. My grove had five varieties of bananas: two kinds of non-ripening green plantains and three ripening varieties: one medium-sized white, the other medium-sized yellow (a most common variety), and one smaller orange variety, the most delicious of all.

To complete my building project I had to construct an outhouse toilet. The natives took care of it by building one over a small inlet into the swamps that stretched in front of my house, insisting that the crayfish would prosper on my products. The toilet was most adequate, located a short distance from the house and with one unique quality: it was alive and grew. The poles the natives used for construction came from freshly cut trees and were not stripped of their bark. About a year later, a Dutch officer came to stay in my house for three days. In the morning, he watched me as I prepared to visit the outhouse, a machete in my hand. "Where are you going?" asked the officer. "To prune my toilet," I replied. The toilet was interesting from another point of view. On each visit I was entertained by all these insects, spiders, and lizards crawling on the living walls. The greatest improvement to toilets in the Kamu Valley was of course made by the