

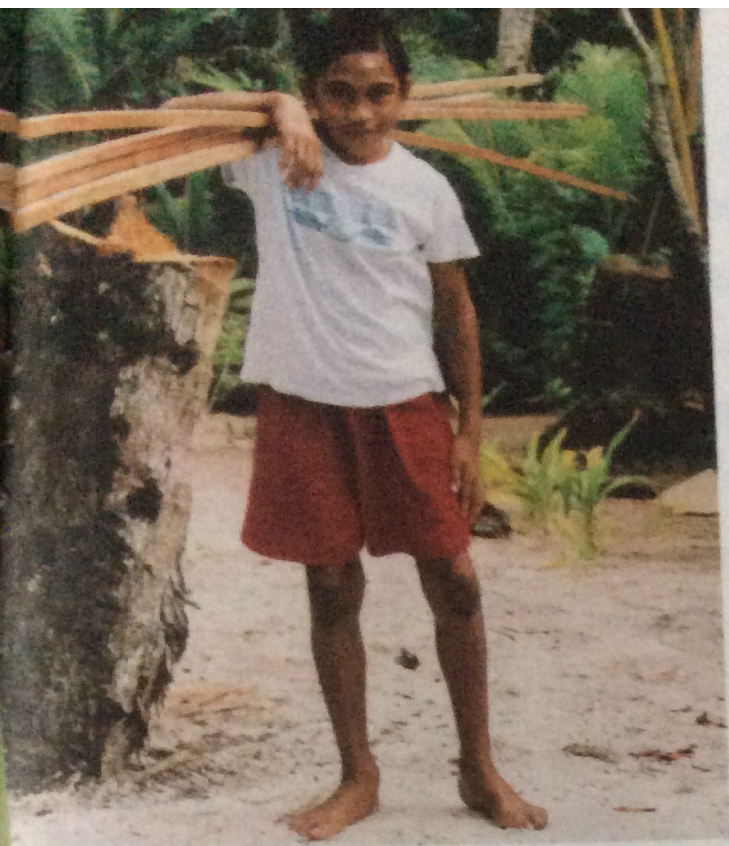
Building a Fale

article and photographs
by Jill MacGregor

When we built our new faleo'o by the beach, lots of people helped.

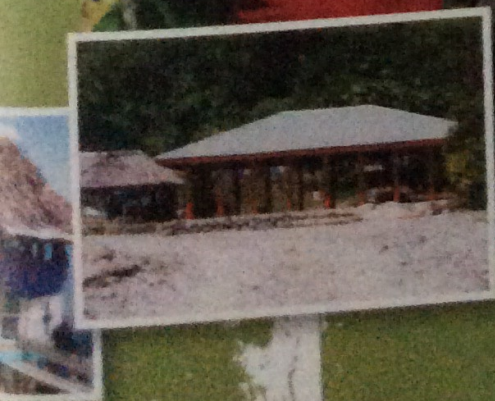
A faleo'o is a small Sāmoan house. It has one room, a floor, a thatched roof, and open walls.





We gathered some of the building materials for our faleo'o from the bush near our village. Dad also bought wood and nails from a timber yard in Apia.

First, we had to level the ground and dig deep holes for the posts. I searched for the coconut palms with the straightest trunks. Dad cut the posts and set them into the holes. I rasped the bark off to make the posts smooth.





When the frame had been nailed together and the wooden floor was finished, it was time to put the roof on.

The thatched roof is made from the narrow leaves of the niuolo tuma palm. My mother and aunties made the lau.¹ They folded the leaves in half over a stiff rod and sewed them in place. My sister Miriama and I stacked up the lau and counted them. There were five hundred panels!



When Dad was ready to put the thatch on, he climbed onto the roof. I handed the lau to my cousin. He hooked them onto a pole and passed them up to Dad. Dad overlapped the lau and tied them onto the frame with the afa² that my grandfather had made. Once the roof was on, it was my job to check that there were no gaps.



² string made from the fibres of the coconut husk

During the cyclone season, there are often fierce storms, so Dad covered the thatch with netting and weighed it down with pieces of wood. Rain slides off the thatch quickly, so the leaves don't rot, but if the roof leaks or is damaged in a storm, we'll patch it with more lau. A new thatched roof should last for at least ten years.

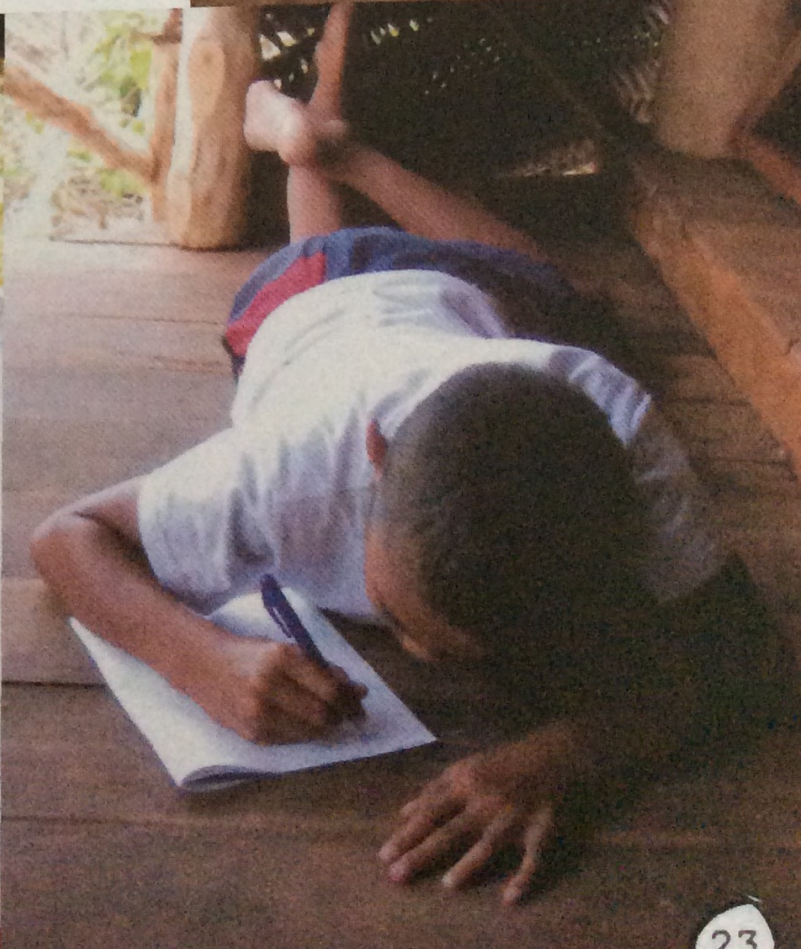


It's very hot in Sāmoa, so the open walls let the breeze flow through the fale and help to keep it cool. At night, or when it rains, we let down the pola. Pola are like blinds made of woven coconut fronds.



Miriama collected the fronds. After they have been soaked in sea water for three or four hours, they are soft and easier to weave. My mother wove ninety pola for the new faleo'o in just one day.

When it's stormy, we tie the pola together to stop them flapping around in the wind. Then we feel safe and snug inside the fale. We can play games, have a sleep, or do our homework. When the sun comes out, we pull the pola up and watch out for our friends to come and play.



We've promised to keep our new faleo'o clean and tidy. We take our shoes off before we come in, and we sit down when we eat. Every morning, we roll up our sleeping mats and store them in the roof.

Now it's time to thank all the builders. We're going to prepare a big feast for everyone who helped us build our beautiful new faleo'o.





Sāmoan Fale

In the olden days, people built fale without using any nails. They tied the frame and roof together with afa.

These days, fale sometimes have concrete posts or wooden walls. Some have corrugated iron roofs. Some fale have a floor made from rock or concrete. And many families live in fale palagi (European-style houses).

