

SHE was obviously the belle of Tobi. The census of Palau shows the numbers of people by age, by sex, and by state. Pretty drab statistics, usually, but in the case of Tobi, the lightly-populated southernmost island of the republic, and a Palau state unto itself, there was only one person who was both female and 17, according to table eight in *Single Years of Age by Sex: 1990*.

Further, when the Census was taken, in the spring of 1990, she was the only female on the island between the ages of 2 and 38. And, to add spice, there were eight males between the ages of 15 and 28. She must have been very popular.

Now the US census is supposed to handle its data in such a way as to avoid any disclosure of personal information, but when the Census people issued numbers about Tobi they started acting like soap opera producers, not close-mouthed bureaucrats.

Everything noted here is based on a government publication, not on any inside information, nor on a visit to the island. Incidentally, we, like the government of Palau, use Tobi as the name of the state; the Census Bureau uses the outdated name Hatobohei. The state's boundaries cover Tobi Island as well as the uninhabited atoll, Helen's Island, on which Indonesia has a nominal claim.

Returning to the belle of Tobi, she apparently had won the attention of at least one of the young males on the island (where men outnumber women 17 to 5) because Census Table 6, *Age and Fertility: 1990*, showed the total fertility of the female population aged 15-19, of which there was one person. That person had a one child. So the Census was telling us, in effect, that on Tobi the 100 per cent of the young women were sexually active as teenagers.

Further, the Census gave us a strong clue as to when the belle became pregnant. As noted earlier there was a two-year-old girl on the island, and no other children under the age of six. The chances are that the belle was the mother of the baby girl while the other children on the island belonged to one woman, aged 38, with seven children, and another, aged 43, with nine according to the age/fertility table. It is unlikely that the belle was the mother of the six-year-old, so the two-year-old must have been hers. So now we have the Census Bureau telling us that the belle presumably became pregnant while 14.

There's more. Table 6 indicated that none of the women aged 15-19 who had given birth had been married, so her lack of a husband is established. Further, there are other data showing that there are four households on the islands — three families and a 65+ male living alone — each headed by someone other

## The belle of Tobi

than a 17-year-old, so she probably is living with her mother (either the 38 or the 43-year-old, we cannot be sure which).

We also know, by a little statistical detective work among the other tabulations, that she is a native of Palau (everyone is), that she lives in poverty (everyone but the 65+ male living alone is) and that she was not then enrolled in school (although the six boys between the ages of 6 and 15 were in school.)

Other data indicated that only one of the adult women was married and living with her spouse, which means that eight of the nine men over the age of 20 on the island were not living with a wife at the time of the census. Stated another way, there were 22 people on the island, and only one working marriage.

Apparently people do not migrate to Tobi, which is closer to Indonesia than it is to Koror, Palau's capital. Perhaps there has been a long-term imbalance in births of men and women, or perhaps, belle's female peers have outmigrated while the males have stayed home — which would be an unusual pattern. There certainly is an indication of emigration; the census of housing reports four owner-occupied house, but 16 houses in all, a dozen of which had presumably been abandoned by people who left the island.

But it is not the case that government has abandoned Tobi, far from it, as Tobi has about as much government per capita as any spot on earth. When one compares the census data with the 1991 Annual Report of the Government of Palau one finds that Tobi has a chief, a governor, a speaker of the local legislature, and a delegate to the Palau legislature, and each of these jobs is held by a different man. So at least four of the nine males over the age of 20 hold government positions. And we have no idea how many people are members of the island legislature.

Our suspicion is that the one person not in Census-defined poverty, the 65+ male who lives alone, is probably the member of the Palau legislature, the OEK, who earns a respectable income for his part-time work in Koror. Although he represents only 22 people, he gets a full vote in the 16-member lower house of the island parliament. Is he also the belle's father or grandfather? That's one question that even the chatty US Census does not answer. □