

# What the Bomb Means to Me:

## A young Marshallese American tells her story

By Marie Anjain

The Castle Bravo hydrogen bomb of 1954 that was tested on Bikini Atoll, contaminated over 7,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean, impacting the islands, the sea critters and the islanders.

Wikipedia describes it as “the most significant accidental radiological contamination ever caused by the US.” How could it have been an “accident” with so many innocent lives on the line? How could all of those logic-based, well-educated US military personnel and nuclear engineers decide to detonate a bomb that is capable of human extinction on a population of innocent people? Did they really not question how harmful this could be, or did they not care? Personally, how does this all affect me?

I first learned about this back in November of 2013, when my dad and I went to see [author and downwinder] Giff Johnson at the Portland Airport. After reading some of the book “Don’t Ever Whisper” by Giff and talking with my dad, I was astonished, and then sad. Astonished that I’d never heard about this before and sad because of what a trauma it was. My dad was exiled from Rongelap to Ebeye as a young child along with a lot of



Here are three NDE Council Members in solidarity with the Marshall Island people, at a Pacific Life Community (PLC) demonstration. The PLC gathers each year around March 1<sup>st</sup> to commemorate the destruction of lives in the Pacific Rim. The 2015 retreat and direct action against nuclearism was held in California at Lockheed-Martin in Sunnyvale.

others because of the contamination. His mother died from thyroid cancer and so did a lot of his other relatives. My mother’s aunt is Darlene Keju, who died in 1996 from breast cancer. My grandma who lives in Tigard right now, whom I’ve visited often, also has breast cancer.

Even though I’ve never met my dad’s parents, or Darlene Keju, I feel like it’s my job to say something on their behalf. I know that times are rough on the islands especially for the people who are affected — but their stories need to be heard. It’s about questioning the government and authority, because they aren’t always doing the right

things; and coming together as a community to overcome the struggles. There was no need for the US to have been secretive about this cataclysmal test and there should never be a time when they could do something like that and try to keep everyone in the dark.

The US is giving \$67.5 million to the Marshall Islands (and more coming this year) to help the victims fare better, but is all this compensation going to help the islands in ways that are safe and effective? Unfortunately, I don’t know exactly where all the money is going. But I do know that from my dad’s visit to Marshall Islands in March last year, the islands aren’t doing much better than they did before the fallout. People are overcrowding a lot of islands, living below the poverty line, suffering from numerous health problems and the Marshallese government isn’t doing much to help them.

It might not seem like that big of a deal when you’re someone like me, who’s living a comfortable life in suburban Oregon, but for my relatives back on Rongelap, Majuro and Ebeye, this anniversary represents a time when their world was disrupted and where

things have only gone downhill generations since.

It's important beyond reason because this detonation is in direct relation as to why there is so much hardship on the islands. Instead of the US trying to help the islands with raising their living standards, they leave a large pile of money and radioactive contamination at the door and ignore the uncontrollable fire of a society that's burning in our own backyard.

I think that the Marshall Islands needs help from the US that's not in the form of armed forces and money, but help that's going to push the Marshall Islands to make dramatic change in their health care, economic, educational and government system. Or better yet, strengthen their own system. The only thing the US feels bad about is the bomb, when there is so much more they can do to help the islands that will help them exponentially.

Marshall islanders are not savages, like how they were viewed in the time of Japanese and American occupations, but they are behind in modern technology and globalization.

The fallout 60 years ago very much impacts my family... today. A lot of my family members have died of cancer from the contamination that was in their parents' blood that now runs in theirs. It is very likely that I could die from this too, which I never really thought about.

I want more young Marshallese to connect with their family and community about this and one day, we could bring real change into the system. What exactly do you mean by change, Marie? I'm still not exactly sure yet but give me some time and I'll get back to you. I think that the first thing people should do is learn about this and develop their own opinions so we can all make small steps for change, together.

That's what [the 60th anniversary of the Castle Bravo explosion] means to me: change and hope for the future.

*Marie Anjain is fifteen years old, and her father came to the US in 1995. Marie's article previously appeared in the February 21, 2014 issue of MarshallIslandsJournal.com NDE reprints this article with permission on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first three nuclear bomb explosions which contaminated Japan and New Mexico in 1945.*

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