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"I Saw the Ash Fall on Him" Excerpt from Testimony before the United States Senate,
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, June 16, 1977

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People of the Marshall Islands, Utrik and Rongelap Atolls, 1975-1977. (Photos by Glenn Alcalay.)



☢ “I Saw the Ash Fall on Him”

Excerpt from Testimony before the
United States Senate, Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources,
June 16, 1977

*John Anjain, Chief Magistrate
of Rongelap Atoll*

In the morning, the sun rose in the east. And then something very strange happened. It looked like a second sun was rising in the west. We heard a noise like thunder. We saw strange clouds over the horizon. But the sun in the west, which we know now was the bomb, faded away. We heard no more noise. But we did see the cloud.

In the afternoon, something began falling from the sky upon our island. It looked like ash from a fire. It fell on me, it fell on my wife, it fell on our infant son. It fell on the trees and on the roofs of our houses. It fell on the reefs and into the lagoon.... We did not understand. No one told us what to expect. We were not prepared.

Later on, in the early evening, it rained. The rain fell on the roofs of our houses. It washed away the ash. The water mixed with the ash which fell into our water catchments. Men, women, and children drank that water. It did not taste like rainwater, but some people drank it anyway.

Then the next day, I think it was the next day, some Americans came to our island in a

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boat. They had a machine with them. They went around the island. They looked very worried and talked rapidly to each other. They told us we must not drink the water in our catchment tanks. They left. They did not explain anything.... Americans again came on our island. They explained that we were in great danger because of the ash. They said if we did not leave, we would die. They told us to leave everything and to only take our clothes. Some people were very afraid and fell into the water trying to get into the landing boat. Some people were taken away to Kwajalein by airplane.... Some people were feeling sick. Some people had an itching on their skin where the ash was. Later, some people got very sick. They threw up. They felt weak. Later, the hair of men, women, and children began to fall out. A lot of people had burns on their skin. There were doctors at Kwajalein and they examined us. Now we were very afraid. We thought we were going to die.

Three years passed very slowly. The American doctors came to examine us from time to time. Many people complained that they did

not feel well. Many women said that they had miscarriages, and that the babies did not look like human babies. Some babies were born dead. The doctors said that they did not know why. They did not see the dead babies, so they could not tell us why.

In 1957, we returned to Rongelap.... We were happy to return. The Americans were very kind. They built us new homes, a school, a dispensary. They built new water catchments. But they told us not to eat certain foods, especially coconut crabs.... They say that they still have some poison in them from the bomb. We were home, and we were still afraid.

But even though the Americans were kind, we were still not happy. Some people still did not feel good. We could not eat food we wanted to eat. The American doctors came every year to examine us. Every year they came, and they told us that we were not sick, and then they would return the next year. But they did find something wrong. They found one boy did not grow as fast as boys his age. They gave him medicine. Then they began finding the thyroid sickness.

My son Leko was 13 when they found his thyroid was sick. They took him away to a hospital in America. They cut out his thyroid. They gave him some medicine and told him to take it every day for the rest of his life. The same thing happened to other people. The doctors kept returning and examining us. Several years ago, they took me to a hospital in America, and they cut out my thyroid. They gave me medicine and told me to take it every day for the rest of my life....

In 1972, they took Leko away again. They said they wanted to examine him. They took him to America to a big hospital near Washington. Later, they took me to this hospital near Washington because they said he was very sick. My son Leko died after he arrived. He never saw his island again. He returned home in a box. He is buried on our island. The doctors say he had a sickness called leukemia. They are quite sure it was from the bomb.

But I am positive.

I saw the ash fall on him. I know it was the bomb. I watched him die.



*John Anjain in 1999.
(Photo by W. Nicholas Captain.)*