

Sailing True

IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

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Ancient mariners traveled the seas guided by the positions of the sun, moon, and stars. At night they kept their eyes keenly focused on the North Star, its fixed position providing a heavenly anchor for sailors, helping them sail a true course to their destination.

In the Marshall Islands of the Pacific Ocean, sailors discovered another technique. There, wave patterns, or ocean swells, flow between the atolls and islands in a consistent pattern. A well-trained mariner can travel hundreds of miles by following an intricate web of swells—each like a one-way street—from one island or atoll to the next. Those who know where the swells are and where they flow can lead other travelers safely to their destinations.

Likewise, Jesus Christ is our perfect example, whose true light guides us. His laws and ordinances, like the

ocean swells, can lead us safely to our heavenly home. Yet for all of us, there are others whose service and support work in concert with the Master Navigator's role. In the following stories, three Marshallese members share how others helped them navigate life's rocky shoals and storms to lead them unto Christ.

The Influence of a Righteous Woman

Hirobo Obeketang sits back on his couch and smiles. He and his wife, Linda, have just finished holding family home evening with four of their children and the sister missionaries. They also treated the missionaries to a fish dinner, complete with eyes and tail—a tradition in Majuro, the capital of the Marshall Islands. As Hirobo describes his life, he expresses how grateful he is for the Church, the



*As we sail through the rocky shoals of life,
each of us benefits from the guidance of
faithful members to help us make our way
back to our heavenly home.*

gospel, and his family,
especially his wife.

It is June 2009. One day earlier the Majuro Marshall Islands Stake was created, and Hirobo was called to serve as the first stake executive secretary. Hirobo, as new stake president Arlington Tibon describes him, “is very, very strong,” one of the faithful leaders of the island.

But Hirobo is the first to point out that until recently that wasn’t the case. In fact, he credits his wife with being the strong one—the one who made the difference in his life. He explains, “I was baptized when I was eight years old, but when I was 16, I became less active.”

A few years later he and Linda began living together, though they weren’t married. Linda was not a member of the Church. In 2000, shortly after Linda discovered that Hirobo had been baptized as a child, she became interested in the Church and began meeting with the sister missionaries.

“She studied for two years and decided she wanted to be baptized,” Hirobo recalls. “We had to get married first, but I wasn’t interested in getting married. I was confused; I was really into the world’s temptations. I didn’t understand the importance of family, and I didn’t really care or listen to anybody.”

Linda, though not baptized, raised their children in the Church. Every year she asked Hirobo to marry her so she could get baptized; each time he said no. Over the years two of their daughters were baptized, but Hirobo did not attend their baptisms.

Then, in 2006, their nine-year-old son, Takao, passed away

from a seizure and high fever. About 300 members from the Majuro district came to the funeral to support the family.

“Their support was a really big thing for me,” Hirobo says. “I started to think that God was probably telling me something.”

He began thinking about how he was the reason his wife couldn’t get baptized, even though he was a member of the Church. “She was getting stronger and stronger. She was really inspiring me,” he recalls.



“So I sat down and thought about how I was halfway through my life. I asked myself, ‘Am I going to continue doing what I am doing? Do I have a chance to work for God for the second half of my life?’ I started saying my prayers and thinking about coming back to church to start working for God.”



Hirobo began studying with the missionaries and relearning doctrine. President Nelson Bleak of the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission befriended him, as did other members, including then-district president Arlington Tibon. Finally, Hirobo committed to return, and the next thing he knew, he was attending not just sacrament meeting but also Sunday School and priesthood meeting. At last, Hirobo made up his mind.

“When I came back, I said, ‘This is it. This is what I’m going to do.’ And it changed my life completely.”

Hirobo and Linda were married on August 30, 2008. He soon received the Aaronic Priesthood and baptized his wife. Two months later Hirobo received the Melchizedek Priesthood and was called as the district executive secretary.

Hirobo looks at his wife and smiles. “She couldn’t believe I was the one who baptized her,” he says. “Imagine—it took her eight years, from 2000 to 2008. She is amazing.”

The Example of a Righteous Father

Sometimes our guide, like a mariner, works closely with us, teaching us what we need to know so we can successfully navigate life. In many cases the mariner accomplishes this by setting the example for us to follow. Such was the case with Patricia Horiuchi’s father, Frank.

After meeting the missionaries, Frank began regularly inviting them over for dinner. Soon he started taking the lessons. But no one else in his family wanted anything to do with the Church. “When we saw the missionaries coming,” Patricia says, “we would all run away—me and my younger brothers and sisters.”

Then Frank was baptized in July 2007 by the mission president, Nelson Bleak. It was a defining moment for Patricia and her siblings.

“I saw my father starting to change,” she says. “I knew that if the gospel could touch my father’s heart, it could touch mine and change my life. So I decided to study with the sister missionaries, and they challenged me to study the Book of Mormon and the Bible. My brother and I had had a fight before that, and I had never forgiven him. Then I read in the scriptures that if you forgive others, God will forgive you.” (See 3 Nephi 13:14–15.)

Patricia realized she had to forgive her brother in order to begin changing her life, be clean, and have peace. So she did.

“After I threw away my bad attitudes and changed to a new person who kept the commandments, I was so excited. I knew I had to get baptized so I could be in the true Church,” she says. “The Church put me on the right track. It separated



me from bad influences. It taught me to respect my parents, to stay in school, and to keep on the right track.”

The Influence of a Righteous Man

Lydia Kaminaga, like Hirobo Obeketang, was born into the Church but became less active during her teen years. But the story

Above left: Hirobo Obeketang (also shown with his family on the previous pages) works as a hotel manager. Below: Patricia Horiuchi was a leader for the Marshall Islands’ first young single adult conference in June 2009 (bottom right).



UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES

Though geography, culture, and distance may separate them from other Latter-day Saints, members in the Marshall Islands explain that they face many of the same challenges all members do.

Gary Zackious (right), a stake young single adult leader, says that “people come up to you and say, ‘We don’t need a prophet today, and we don’t need any more scripture.’ Some members don’t really read the scriptures or understand them, so when someone tells them something that slackens their belief, they back off from what they know is true.”



For Gary, the solution is simple: “I was challenged by the missionaries to pray about the Book of Mormon, the Restoration, and Joseph Smith to know if they are true. One night I was praying on my knees. I felt the Spirit. It was a feeling I had never experienced before. I know the things I was taught by the missionaries are true. Reading the Book of Mormon strengthened my testimony as a young convert.” From his baptism to his mission to today, Gary says, “My testimony has grown as I read the Book of Mormon and study the scriptures and the words of the prophets.”

Ernest Mea (right), who works with Gary as a Church translator in the Marshall Islands, says that a lot of young people get caught in immorality. He keeps on the strait and narrow path by engaging in wholesome activities with like-minded friends. “Before my mission, we played basketball at the church every day but Sunday and Monday,” he says.



For Michael Lone (right) of the Jenrok Ward, joining the Church in 2006 came at a price: he couldn’t continue living at home. Showing faith and conviction, he was baptized anyway.



Just a year later he was called on a mission—to the Marshall Islands. More recently, Michael’s family has begun to show interest in the Church and to study with the missionaries.



of her journey back is as remarkable as it is distinct.

Lydia and her husband, Kaminaga Kaminaga, both grew up in the Church. “I never had any doubt about the teachings of the Church,” says Kaminaga. “I’ve always believed them.”

But life moved differently for Lydia. When she was in seventh grade, she says, “I was the only Mormon in my school, and I felt left out. I did what my friends were doing. I got my priorities wrong.”

Lydia’s parents sent her to Provo, Utah, USA, to live with family, hoping their influence might inspire Lydia to live the gospel. Though she learned things that helped her later in life, at the time she wasn’t interested in Church activity.

Lydia moved back to the Marshall Islands in January 2002, just a month after Kaminaga returned from serving a mission in Japan. They met shortly thereafter. Although Lydia was not living Church standards, Kaminaga kept coming to her house pretending that he wanted to visit her nephew, Gary Zackious.

Eventually, Kaminaga made up his mind

“I have a strong testimony of repentance,” says Lydia Kaminaga, shown here with her husband, Kaminaga, and their daughter, Wellisa.



to talk to her parents about going out on dates—wholesome, clean activities—with Lydia. Although they initially tried to dissuade him, Kaminaga says he “finally told them, ‘There’s still a chance for her to change.’ When I said that, the whole feeling in the room changed. Her dad cried and said, ‘I’ve always wanted her back in the Church. You can try.’”

At first Lydia didn’t take Kaminaga seriously. After all, he was a clean-cut returned missionary, and she hadn’t been active.

“But he saw something I didn’t see,” Lydia explains. Since



she wasn't dating anyone, she agreed to go out with him. "He brought me back. Being his girlfriend, I had to set my standards straight. He reminded me of my covenants made at baptism. He reminded me of all the things I really missed a lot, like reading scriptures and family home evening. Kaminaga and I did service projects together. We read the Book of Mormon. We went to firesides. He showed me how to live differently. Going to church was not just sacrament meeting but also Sunday School and Relief Society too."

As they spent time together on dates that were wholesome and uplifting, Lydia's life began to change and her testimony grew. She still had to clear some things up, however.

"It was hard coming back," she admits. "Repentance is not easy, but I have a really strong testimony of repentance. In a lot of ways, our dating was about getting to know each other more and about getting me back to church, to see things differently."

"It's about relationships," adds Kaminaga.

Lydia and Kaminaga were married on November 28, 2002. A year later they were sealed in the Laie Hawaii Temple and attended Brigham Young University–Hawaii. Now they live in the Marshall Islands with their three children. Lydia serves as their ward's Sunday School teacher for the young men and young women, and Kaminaga serves as the Young Men president.

As Hirobo, Patricia, and Lydia testify, when we exercise patience and persistence and seek the blessings of the Lord, many things are possible. Those who follow the Savior and listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost can, like the ancient mariner guiding travelers home, make all the difference in another person's life. ■

FIRST STAKE IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

For years Church members in the Marshall Islands have desired to have a stake there. On June 14, 2009, their desires were fulfilled. Elder David S. Baxter of the Seventy, who organized the stake, explains: "It is remarkable how the membership grew in the past couple of years. The stake was created because the development of the Church there made it inevitable. But it has been a long time in coming. Members had to overcome a number of challenges."



Marshall Islands stake president Arlington Tibon (above) taught members while he served as district president that if they wanted a stake, they would have to work for it. He instructed district leaders to teach members from Malachi 3 and 3 Nephi 24 about the blessings of paying tithing. Leaders also encouraged youth and adults to study the Book of Mormon. They even held a successful event where the youth read the Book of Mormon for 12 hours straight.

President Tibon also set a goal to get members to understand "how important it is to be sealed in the temple," explaining that receiving "the endowment helps them overcome a lot of things, makes them different, changes their lives."

Under President Tibon's leadership, members in the Marshall Islands visited two temples: one in Tonga and one in Hawaii. Each visit came after significant sacrifice. But, as Angela Tibon, President Tibon's wife, says, those trips "have had a great impact on how committed members are to Heavenly Father and to the Church."

"Yes," echoes President Tibon, "we saw the spiritual life here in Majuro go way up."

