

Elizabeth Teoli  
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Book Review/Final  
Professor Wertheimer  
LIS 615

KELIN II, Daniel A., editor, *Marshall Islands Legends and Stories*. Honolulu, HI: Bess Press, 2003. 252p. ISBN 1573061417 (hc). 1573061409 (pa). \$17.95. Illus.

Sandwiched between two ocean blue covers is a collection of legends and stories from eight of the Marshall Islands. These tales are traditionally told through oral narration, and are rarely printed. As such, they are in danger of fading away as the *dri-bwebwenatos* (storytellers) of the Islands depart from this world. Daniel Kelin has done a service to not just the Marshallese community, but also to the rest of the storytelling community. Kelin, who is the Director of Drama Education for the Honolulu Theater for Youth, spends time each summer in the Marshall Islands living, teaching, acting, and talking story with the Marshallese people. What started out as a trip to educate youth on health and social issues turned in to a life-long labor of love. For the past 30 years, Kelin has returned to the islands time and again. He has collected hundreds of stories, some can be shared, and some, honoring cultural traditions, cannot.

*Marshall Islands Legends and Stories* proposes to tell a cross-section of tales from the Marshall Islands, everything from creationist myths, to tales of Letao the trickster. What this book delivers is so much more. Kelin begins by providing a brief outline of Marshallese history, and then breaks his collection down into sections, one section per island. Each island's tales have been told by different *dri-bwebwenatos*. To honor each of the nineteen *dri-bwebwenatos* he has written a short biography of them, and paired it with an accompanying picture. The stories are written in the same manner that Kelin heard them, with

only simple editing, primarily for comprehension. This allows for the spirit of the original tale to burst out of the printed page, and into the reader's imagination. Definitions of Marshallese words accompany each story, and a comprehensive glossary and pronunciation guide is at the end of the book. Keeping the traditional language of the tales only serves to enhance this already spectacular collection.

Kelin's book is not the only one of Marshallese, or Pacific Islander folklore, however it stands high above its most accessible contemporary, *Bwebwenatoon etto: A collection of Marshallese legends and traditions* (1992), by Dirk R Spennemann, Margaret Bennett, and Jane Downing. Both books contain legends and tales from many of the Marshall Islands as well as story-enhancing illustrations, however unlike *Marshall Islands Legends and Stories*, *Bwebwenatoon etto* was not produced with the permission of the Marshallese people, or the dri-bwebwenatos whose tales lined the pages of the book. Kelin weaves tales of mystery, intrigue, adventure, lust, love, and island life that are told in such a way that they transport the reader's mind. Spennemann, Bennett, and Downing's tales are printed in a no-nonsense way that does not lead to wonderment, or inspire the growth of the imagination, two of the primary elements of good folkloric composition.

With its wide margins, enjoyable font, thick pages, and strong binding (library binding available for the hardcover edition), this book will be a valuable addition to any collection. However, it is recommended for libraries with rich folklore collections, for avid folk tale readers, for those of Marshallese heritage, or for those who enjoy lessons, laughter, and not just happily ever after's.

Appropriate for all ages, however due to the difficulty of the languages used, it would be recommended for individuals aged 10 and up.

Submitted in September 2015 by Elizabeth Teoli, LIS Student, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Kelin, D. A., & Aisea, T. (2003). *Marshall Islands legends and stories*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: Bess Press.

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Spennemann, D. R., Bennett, M., Downing, J., & Marshall Islands. (1992). *Bwebwenatoon etto: A collection of Marshallese legends and traditions*. Majuro Atoll: Republic of the Marshall Islands, Minsitry [sic] of Internal Affairs, Historic Preservation Office.

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