



LEGENDS OF MICRONESIA

Book Two

MICRONESIAN READER SERIES

Legends of Micronesia

BOOK TWO

Text by EVE GREY

Illustrations by TAMBI LARSEN

Maps by Charles A. Williams, *Journalist Third Class, USN*

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The Lost Boy Of Ailinglaplap

There is a beautiful atoll in the Marshall Islands called Ailinglaplap. It has many islands. They are separated from each other by coral reefs and water. From an airplane, it seems as though a person could jump from one island to another, all around the ring; that is, if he were a giant or used magic. There is an old tale about a boy who did use magic and did jump from island to island, in Ailinglaplap.

Once, long ago, there were a king and a queen with the names of Lerökkiewa and Letuwajewa. They lived on Woja Island in Ailinglaplap Atoll. They had a fine baby boy.

One day, the queen went to bathe the child in sea water. "I'll take him to Likileo, on the ocean side of the island," she said.

She brought along a *jābe*, a wooden basin, of the kind that is used when preparing food. She put the child into the basin in the water, close to shore. "Now my son is in his own little canoe," she said.

The baby sat there, smiling, and the waves rocked him gently. The queen thought that he was safe, and she went away for a short time. But a large wave came and carried the wooden basin out to sea. When the mother returned, it was gone.

"My baby, my poor baby!" she cried.

She could not find the *jābe* or her child, although she ran up and down the beach, looking everywhere. At last, she sat down upon the coral stones of the reef, crying. When night came, she went home and told the king what had happened. He was shocked. He felt sure that the baby had drowned.

The wooden basin drifted far away on the tide, until it came to another island in the atoll. There, a poor man and his wife were looking for clams, and they saw the basin in the water. They found the child and took him to their home. Later, they had a baby girl of their own, who was his playmate.

When the boy was about half grown, he played in the woods one day and became very hungry. He went to the house for something to eat and found a pandanus fruit. He picked it up, tore off a piece, and began to chew it. His parents scolded him.



"That pandanus is the best kind," they said. "It is only for your sister. She's our own child, and you are not."

The boy knew that he had come to the island from another place. But then, for the first time, he realized that he had never been loved as a real son. It made him very unhappy. He thought about the place where he had come from. He wanted to go there and find his real mother and father.

"I don't belong here," he thought. "I ought to go away."

He got ready to leave the next day. He told his little sister, and she begged to go with him.

At first, he refused. "Stay with your parents," he said. "They will always give you the best of everything."

The little one shook her head. "I can't be happy without my brother," she said. Finally, he agreed that she might go. The parents knew nothing of the plan.

The boy said to his sister, "Take your basket and get a few ripe coconuts to take along."

"Why?" asked the little girl.

"To make the waves calm," he replied.

When she brought the coconuts, he said, "Now fill a coconut shell with some of the fine white sand. It will float, if the water is calm."

The child got the sand. They walked to the end of their island.

"Where are we going?" asked the little girl. "To find my real parents," replied her brother.

The boy was able to make a great leap to the next island, but his sister could not jump so far. "Brother, brother, what about me?" she cried.



"Chew some of the coconut," he called back to her, "and spit out the oil. It will make the water calm. Then throw some fine sand upon it."

The child did so, and she was able to walk upon the sand to the next island. They traveled in that way, from island to island of the atoll. At last, they came to Woja Island, where lived the boy's real father and mother, the king and queen.

The two children came to a place between Kween and Lowij, not far from the place where the boy had floated away when he was a baby. Some boys were there, playing a game called *kajeer* with smooth, curved sticks.

The pandanus tree has long, twisting roots that grow far up on the trunk of the tree and then reach down to the ground. Marshallese boys cut sticks from such curving roots and struck them upon the ground in a certain way. The boy who could bounce his stick the farthest was the winner. Both the game and the stick were called *kajeer*.

Suddenly, the boy wanted to play too, but he had no stick. He went from one of the children to the other. "My friend, will

you lend me your *kajeer* to play with?" he asked. Each boy replied, "Where is your own stick? Why don't you play with that?"

Finally, he came to the youngest boy, who said, "All right, my friend, use my *kajeer*."

The boy took the *kajeer*. He put its point to the ground and rolled the stick fast between his hands. It made a whirring sound, *kur, kweer, kweer*. He rolled it faster and faster and sang a song. He asked the help of Etao, a spirit, in playing the game. "Let me win what I need to win," he said.

The god Etao was sly. Even his name, *etao*, meant "sly." He could help a boy win a game, but he also liked to play tricks on people and then laugh at them.

The boy's song went something like this:

"Kurlēñ, kurlēñ, kwarlōñ, kwarlōñ,
Come, Etao, take its head, take my stick up high
Until it disappears in the sky.
Press its tail and make it fly!"

The boy threw the stick against the hard ground. It flew far away and struck the eye of his own mother, the queen, who had lost him, long ago. The king, his father, was very angry. He sent men everywhere to find out who had thrown the *kajeer*. "Bring every person in the island!" he said.

Each person held his finger to the hole of the queen's eye, to see if it would fit, but no finger was of the right size.

"Are there any other persons on the island?" asked the king.

Someone told him that there were two strangers, a boy and a girl, who had come to Woja Island. "They must come here at once!" cried the king, and the two children were brought to him.

First, the king tried the finger of the girl, and it was almost a fit. Then he tried the finger of the boy. It was just the right size to fit the hole.

"You're the one who put out the queen's eye with a *kajeer*!" shouted the king.

Strong men took the boy and would have killed him, but the king stopped them. "Leave this to me," he said.

The boy was held prisoner, and the king began to sharpen his axe on a large stone. The head of the axe was made of the hard shell of the giant clam, and he rubbed it to a fine edge.

The sister began to cry. She asked for dry pandanus leaves and began to weave a burial mat for her foster brother's body. Everyone knew that the king would chop off the boy's head.

While the king was sharpening his axe, some black sea birds came and sat on the roof of the house. Each one had red legs and a white spot on his head. The birds had a loud cry, "*Ki ke ki ke!*" and they sang a song:

"Ki ke ki ke aao!

Your mother is the queen, Letuwajewa,

Your father is the king, Lerökkiewa.

Farewell, farewell, poor, poor boy."

The birds sang the song several times, but the king did not hear. He made too much noise with his axe. But when the edge was sharp, he heard the birds singing.

"Oh, oh, what is this? What are they saying?" he cried, dropping his axe.

The fourth time the birds sang, he understood the words. He jumped up and went to the boy's sister. "Where did you two come from?" he asked.

The girl told him that the boy had been found by her parents, when he was a baby. "My mother and father took him," she said. "Now he has come to Woja Island to find his real parents. He threw the *kajeer* with a song to Etaa, to find out where to go."

The king was surprised. He knew then that the boy was his own son, lost long ago, and that the queen's eye had been put out by accident, or by the god, Etaa.

The king ran back and picked up his axe. "You almost cut off the head of my son!" he said.

He threw the axe against the stone that he had been using to sharpen it. The clamshell head broke into hundreds of little pieces. Then the king went to his son and put his arms around him. The queen could hardly speak, she was so happy. So the boy was forgiven and was safe in the home of his real father and mother. They took his sister also as their child. When the boy grew up, he became king of Ailinglaplap Atoll.