



# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY

TEL# 3035 +++ P.O. BOX 1322, MAJURO, MARSHALL ISLANDS 96960  
5203 FAX 5202



**TERRY KEJU**  
**EPA**  
**Alumni,**  
**University of**  
**the South Pacific**





**TERRY KEJU**

# Friends Chart Terry's Success

## EDUCATION

### Elementary

**1976-1978:** Ebeye Public Elementary School, Marshall Islands

**1979-1985:** Queen of Peace Elementary School, Marshall Islands

### Secondary

**1985-1986:** Assumption High School, Marshall Islands

**1987-1990:** Xavier High School, Federated States of Micronesia

### Tertiary

**1991:** College of the Marshall Islands

**1992:** University of the South Pacific, Fiji

**1993-1995:** University of the South Pacific, Marshall Islands

**1996-1999:** University of the South Pacific, Fiji BA

**2007:** University of South Pacific, Fiji



Father Leonard Hacker S.J., Ellia Sablan-Zebedy, Alfred Alfred Jr. ... these well-known Marshallese names and others slip from Terry Keju's tongue as he describes a poor childhood and a difficult transition to adulthood. Without the advice and nurturing of these friends, it seems that Terry may never have achieved his current role of Deputy General Manager of RMI's Environmental Protection Authority (EPA).

Born in 1970, Terry grew up on the Kwajalein 'bedroom' community of Ebeye, an overcrowded island whose population in part services the needs of the United States Army Kwajalein Atoll on Kwajalein, Kwajalein.

"I was very poor. I lived with my grandmother who looked after me and my younger brother," Terry said in his sunny Delap office. "My grandmother worked in a restaurant on Ebeye as a chef. One day, she made a promise to me that she would send me to a Catholic school, even though she had little money to support me. My grandfather, however, died while I was young."

Terry attended Ebeye Public Elementary School from grade 1 to 3, then transferring Queen of Peace Elementary, repeating third grade as he switched schools. "I was very excited and thrilled to be attending the Catholic school and learning about the Catholic faith. At the same time, I was very nervous about my teacher when I was asked to read and spell the words in English."

**'I was very nervous about my teacher when I was asked to read and spell the words in English.'**

In 1985, his father and stepmother, who worked on Kwajalein and Ebeye, rose to the challenge of having a son and sent Terry to Assumption High School on Majuro. The switch to a new city was hard. "I felt left out," Terry said, adding "the Church and school helped me make it through ninth grade." But a brush with death brought a sudden halt to Terry's education.

"I was living in Rairok with my relatives and was hit by a car," he said. "I was hospitalized for some months. I could have lost my life." His memories of the accident and being a patient in Majuro Hospi-

tal are less than vague. "I really don't remember anything from that time, except that I had some aunties who looked after me."

Finally Terry recovered from his injuries and Father Hacker, who Terry had been close to during his year at Assumption school, offered him the chance of attending Xavier High School in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia. So, with his father's financial help, he flew to Chuuk, but was again forced to repeat a grade.

"I had to do ninth grade again, it was the school's policy," Terry said. "It had nothing to do with your age; instead it was about education levels."

Now 17, Terry boarded at Xavier and quickly realized this was a different regimen: "It was very strict. There was a clearly defined time to study and to play. That's when I really became serious about education. I realized I wasn't the smartest or the brightest student, so I had to make up for my shortcomings with lots of hard work.

"During those years, I started to become worried about my future, what I would do." Xavier's 'buddy system' helped alleviate some of the pressure. "We had what they called a 'promise brother' and 'promise sister' and my sister and her family really helped me. I became part of her family and they supported me."

With his favorite subject being Social Studies, during his final year in 1990 Terry applied for further studies at the University of Hilo. With no news from the Hawaiian school, after graduation, he returned to Majuro and began attending the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI). "I did two semesters of Liberal Arts and my grades were pretty good," he said. "CMI was very easy for me, perhaps because I'd done so well at Xavier."

Then he received the news that he'd been accepted for studies at Hilo. "But I didn't go, because at that time RMI had just become

a member of USP's regional organization and the RMI Scholarship Office wanted me to go to the University's Suva (Fiji) campus. I was pretty scared to go to Fiji, mainly because USP used the British system, which would be different."

But at the end of the day, the Scholarship Office controlled the money and made the decisions and before long Terry was sitting on a south-bound plane.

"Fiji was totally different in so many ways, particularly the size of the campus ... it was huge ... and the studies themselves. The content was pretty much the same (as that at CMI), but it was much stricter. Plus at first I couldn't understand the teachers, who were Fijian, Indo-Fijian and Australian. Their language was a barrier for me. So was time management and it took me a while to adapt."

In that year, 1992, Terry lived in a campus dormitory. "I was broke all the time and failed my first semester of the Foundation Program. Well, I failed four subjects and passed one."

But failure was not an option. "I realized I had to put in extra effort," Terry said. "I changed my attitude and managed to pass the second semester. One person who really helped me at USP was another Marshallese friend named Alfred Alfred Jr., who is now Deputy Chief of Mission in the RMI Embassy in Japan. He was doing his degree and he was a great mentor for me and encouraged me to work hard."

By now Terry felt he needed to be earning a pay check, so in early 1993 he returned to Majuro to find work. "I started as a teller at the Bank of Hawaii and worked there from 1993 to 1995. At the same

**'I changed my attitude and managed to pass the second semester.'**

time I continued some courses at USP, which was then based at CMI. I needed to finish three more units.”

He finally graduated from the Foundation Program in 1995. “Then in 1996 I went back to USP in Fiji on an Australian scholarship. “I knew I wanted something better than just being a teller at a bank,” Terry said. “I was convinced I had more than is required of a bank teller in me after all those years of hard work and sacrifices. I wanted a better job with better pay.”

This last stretch was especially motivating as Terry now had a wife, Annsely, to look after. As well, Ellia Sablan-Zebedy, now a senior administrator at CMI, told me that “if I wanted to be something I needed to go back to school.

“She told me that nothing is impossible and that you just have to give all your best commitments so that you can be successful one day. She was like a mother to me and always gave me good advice for further opportunities.”

So Terry again found himself sitting on a south-bound plane. “For that first year, I lived in the dorm,” Terry said. “But the next year I brought my wife with me and we lived in the married quarters at the USP campus. She cooked and looked after me.”

Terry again chose to study Social Sciences, majoring in Geography and Education, but in his first year he found the switch from a job back to studying difficult.

“That first year back in Fiji I was a bit slacked and only passed two of my four subjects. However, as days passed by, I basically managed to pass the rest of the school year with the assistance of Ellia supervising and tutoring some of geography courses. In addition, when my wife came in the second semester I did better, because she pushed me. We didn’t have any kids then, so I had plenty of time to study.”

Terry's grades improved and he achieved his Bachelor of Arts in 1999. "We were all wearing our gold gowns at the graduation. I was so excited. And then I looked up and saw the RMI flag waving. I felt so proud and was thinking 'finally I have my degree'."

Back on Majuro, Terry was offered a job at EPA, "but the then Minister of Education, Justin deBrum, offered me a job in administration as School Coordinator." Terry grimaced and added: "I did not enjoy that job."

But his friend, Ellia, was working over at Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA) as Chief of Policy and Planning. "She needed an assistant, so I applied for that job."

He was clearly happy with the decision. "I learned a lot at MIMRA," he said. "I found out about fisheries policies, implementing public awareness issues, how to facilitate community projects..."

From 2000 to 2006, Terry enjoyed the challenges MIMRA offered, but still in the back of his mind there remained a burning desire for more education. "In 2007 I went back to USP in Fiji to do my 'post-grad' degree in Marine Affairs." He left his wife and his son and daughter at home and again headed south. "This time there were quite a lot of Marshallese at USP, so it was socially much easier. I got a flat with a few of the other under-grad Marshallese."

It was a successful academic year for Terry and with even more skills under his belt, he returned to Majuro and heard of a vacancy at OEPPC (Office of Environmental Planning and Policy Coordination).

**'This time  
there were  
quite a lot of  
Marshallese at  
USP, so it was  
socially much  
easier.'**

“I applied and got the job,” he said. “I was happy there, but after eight months, I learned that the position as Deputy General Manager of EPA was open.” So in October, 2008, he again moved sideways and upwards.

“At this job I’ve been learning more about management skills, and financial and personnel issues. Recently, I’ve been working on a three-year strategy plan for EPA, plus I have to ensure that EPA meets its mandates with the US under the Compact agreement.”

And will Terry be doing any more higher education? “Hmmm,” he ponders as the phone rings yet again in his busy office. “I have been thinking about doing my masters degree. But that will only happen if time allows.”

*Profile compiled by Karen Earnshaw,  
Majuro, Marshall Islands, August, 2009*