

OPINION PAGES PO Box 14, Majuro, MH 96960 or marshallislandsjournal@gmail.com

Steve Sawyer: A mighty

BRIAN FITZGERALD *

Steve Sawyer wanted to write his own obituary, and he would have done a better job of it, but time got away from him. I say he would have done a better job at it because he did a better job than most of us at just about everything he put his hand to.

After hours, when he wasn't a driving force in the global struggle to address the climate emergency, or taking a fledgling organization called Greenpeace out of its tumultuous adolescence into powerhouse adulthood, he was an outstanding blues guitarist, an enviably precise writer, a proud parent of magically gifted children, a sailor, a science fiction fan, and a connoisseur of wry irony.

In his parting instructions, he pointed his wife of more than 30 years, Kelly Rigg, to Lou Gehrig's farewell speech as a model for his obituary. It's a short speech in which Lou says almost nothing about the bad break that

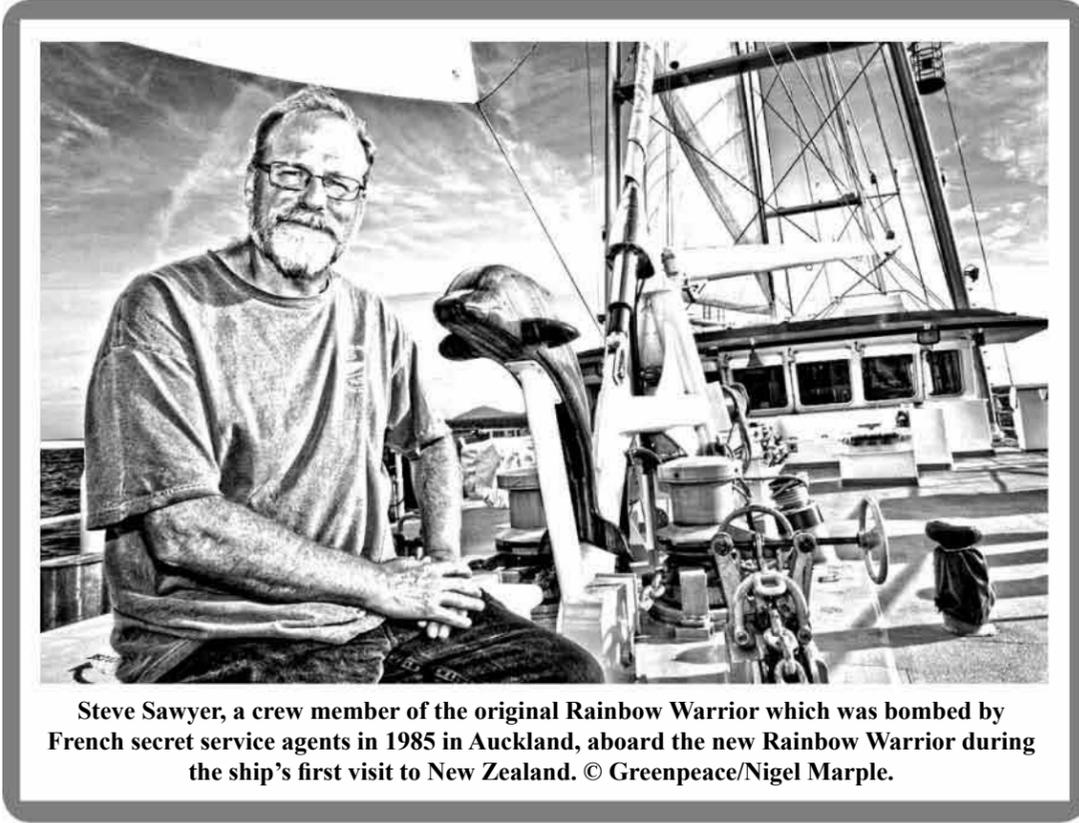
will shortly take his life, but speaks about the honor he had to live the life he did, and his appreciation of having shared it with the extraordinary people he shared it with.

Steve Sawyer passed on 31 July, 2019 shortly after he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He was the Senior Policy Advisor at the Global Wind Energy Council. For over 10 years as the organization's General Secretary, Steve tirelessly represented the wind industry and worked to convince governments to adopt wind as the solution to growing energy demand and carbon emissions.

During Steve's tenure at the head of the Council, global wind installations grew from 74GW to 539GW and became one of the world's most important energy sources. He contributed significantly to the development of the wind industry in places such as India, China, Brazil and South Africa.

He was a prominent speaker in public and private forums, and wrote innumerable articles, blogs and position papers.

He previously served in leadership positions at Greenpeace for nearly three decades. At both the Global Wind Energy Council and at Greenpeace, Sawyer was driven by a fierce love of nature and the sea forged in his childhood in New England, which he often described as most happily spent "messing about with boats."



Steve Sawyer, a crew member of the original Rainbow Warrior which was bombed by French secret service agents in 1985 in Auckland, aboard the new Rainbow Warrior during the ship's first visit to New Zealand. © Greenpeace/Nigel Marple.

He studied philosophy at Haverford College (fellow alum Dave Barry wagged that its motto was "We've never heard of you either") where he was steeped in the classics. But his reading of Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, and Saul Alinsky pulled him toward the rising environmental movement. From Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings he drew lifelong inspiration for seemingly hopeless causes, and the faith that a small group of principled and courageous under-dogs could, against all odds, change the world.

He was by his own admission a card-carrying hippy when a Greenpeace canvasser knocked on his door looking for a donation.

Steve volunteered instead. He went door to door in the Boston area as a Greenpeace canvasser himself, before joining the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior in January 1980 to campaign against the transport and discharge into the ocean of radioactive wastes.

Sawyer's story and that of the Rainbow Warrior would be entwined throughout Greenpeace's early days. He lent his maritime knowledge to a refit in Stonington, Maine, blasting rust and painting, and later to converting her to sail to prepare for a crossing of the Pacific Ocean. It was there that the ship took on a mercy mission from which Steve would draw a lifelong sense of pride, relocating

the inhabitants of the Rongelap Atoll, poisoned by fallout from US atmospheric nuclear weapons tests. Steve and the crew relocated the entire community and all their worldly belongings, whose requests for relocation had been denied by the US Government, despite rising incidences of cancer and birth defects. The event was seared into Sawyer's heart and imagination.

It was aboard that same ship that he and the crew were celebrating his 29th birthday in New Zealand when two limpet mines, later revealed to have been planted by the French Secret Service, sent the ship to the bottom of the harbour, taking the life of photographer Fernando Pereira. It was an act of state terrorism in reaction to Greenpeace protests against nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific, a cause that Sawyer had spearheaded. The attack backfired badly, propelling the cause of the Pacific Islanders victimised by testing into the limelight,

and driving massive growth at Greenpeace as donations and expressions of support poured in.

Sawyer's handling of the aftermath, and the successful suit of the French Government for damages, further propelled his own reputation as a leader and in 1988 he was named Executive Director of Greenpeace International.

Greenpeace had some of its greatest triumphs in the years Sawyer was at the helm – from the declaration of Antarctica as off-limits to gas and oil exploration, to the Montreal Protocol limiting ozone-depleting gasses to an end to radioactive waste dumping at sea worldwide. He also led Greenpeace to begin campaigning in earnest against climate change long before most of the environmental movement understood the threat. According to insiders, his tenure marked the coming of age of an organization that had once prided itself on its rag-tag mystic hippiedom.

In 2001 Sawyer shifted his focus exclusively to the existential threat of climate change. Through his work at Greenpeace and the Global Wind Energy Council he became a familiar figure at the annual UN climate talks and fought fiercely to awaken governments and corporations to the dangers of rising temperatures. He had a scholarly understanding of the science, an activist's anger at inaction, and a strategist's eye for where to apply pressure or introduce solutions.

To his colleagues, Sawyer will be remembered for the qualities of his leadership: his stubborn courage, his ability to inspire against overwhelming odds, his absence of ego, and his faith in the power of loyalty, integrity, rationality, and commitment. He was Gandalf to a rag-tag fellowship of underdogs, reminding those around him, by his own example, in the face of one existential threat after another, that we cannot choose the time that we are born to, and that our most important task is to decide what to do with the time that is given us.

He is survived by his wife Kelly, his daughter, Layla, and his son, Sam.

* The writer was an activist and volunteer with Greenpeace for 34 years and ran Greenpeace International's website and digital activism program until 2014, when he left to co-found Dancing Fox, Ltd. The company's goal is to help changemakers write a new story rooted in the triumph of human ingenuity, compassion and vision – a story unflinching in its optimism and promise, "and to help that story change the world."

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force for global change

GIFF JOHNSON

In 1984, various Greenpeace people began communicating with me and others about their planned Pacific tour for the Rainbow Warrior vessel the following year. They were planning to visit the Marshall Islands, then island hop south on their way to New Zealand, stopping in various ports to promote a variety of ocean environment and anti-nuclear issues.

They were seeking advice on what activities they could do in the Marshall Islands. Because I had been involved in nuclear test legacy advocacy for many years, I was well aware of the concern Rongelap Islanders had with ongoing exposure to radioactivity living on Rongelap Atoll. I talked with Senator Jeton Anjain, who represented Rongelap at the time, about the upcoming visit to see if he had ideas of what the Rainbow Warrior might do in relation to Rongelap during a brief visit to the Marshall Islands. Jeton immediately expressed interest in the visit. Jeton had been vocal



Campaigner Steve Sawyer, is welcomed by inhabitants from Rongelap. The Rainbow Warrior crew is evacuating Rongelap Islanders to Mejjato. Rongelap suffered nuclear fallout from US nuclear tests done from 1946 – 1958, making it a hazardous place to live. The health of many adults and children has suffered as a result. The Greenpeace crew took adults, children and 100 tonnes of belongings onboard. © Greenpeace / Fernando Pereira

for years demanding action, including independent radiation studies, for Rongelap. This led to my arranging a meeting between Greenpeace International board member Steve Sawyer and Jeton. The three of us met in Seattle late in 1984 to discuss the forthcoming voyage of the Rainbow Warrior. When Steve asked Jeton what he thought the vessel might do in relation to Rongelap, Jeton immediately said they needed help to evacuate the community to another island. Steve's reply

was to ask, "You mean a symbolic evacuation where we take a few people to another island and stage a media event?" Focused action and media events of this nature were Greenpeace's bread and butter, bringing high-visibility to environmental problems worldwide.

"No," responded Jeton immediately. "We need to evacuate the entire community to Mejjato Island in Kwajalein. Everyone and their houses, too." Steve was initially taken aback by this request. Sitting with this pair in the house

we were in in Seattle, I could see Steve's mind turning over the logistics challenges in his mind. Jeton and Steve continued discussing it, and the idea for the evacuation of Rongelap began to take shape.

It would happen in May 1985, when the Rainbow Warrior arrived in the Marshall Islands. It took a couple of weeks for the crew of the Warrior, which included Steve, to move the population of several hundred and their houses (which were torn

down so the materials could be loaded onto the vessel for shipment to Mejjato).

As the move progressed, some US officials were quoted in news articles criticizing the Rongelap resettlement as inspired by outsiders who were misleading Rongelap Islanders about radiation exposure and the need to relocate. At the time, I laughed about this recalling Steve's initial reaction to Jeton's relocation request: He was shocked and unsure. Point being, it was Jeton's and the Rongelap community's decision to move; the Rainbow Warrior was a vehicle to make it happen. Moreover, the resettlement led to the US Congress funding independent studies of Rongelap that confirmed radiation hazards on the atoll. This led to the US Congress appropriating money to capitalize a \$45 million Rongelap Resettlement Fund.

Steve played an important, though background, role in this momentous development that changed the future for the Rongelap community.

Memories of the 1950s

with the Takeuchis



A wonderful life on Ribelle Road

FLOYD K. TAKEUCHI

A few years ago I was having a chat with Ramsey Reimers at the Tide Table Restaurant in the RRE Hotel. His father, Robert Reimers, had been a friend of my parents when we lived on Majuro in the 1950s, and I've always enjoyed a stay at his namesake hotel.

On that particular visit, Ramsey and I were talking about that era. He asked, "Where was your house located?" My somewhat convoluted answer: "Well, you know where the old cement water catchment is by the closed bowling alley? Head straight to the ocean side from there, turn a bit right, and that's where our house was located, overlooking the ocean."

Ramsey looked at me, you could see the light bulb turn on above his head, and he said, "Oh, you lived on Ribelle Road!"

Of course, having grown up on Majuro, I knew what "ribelle" means. But "Ribelle Road" was a new one for me. That's when I broke out laughing — what a typically Marshallese way to call the area where most Trust Territory staff housing was built in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was a practical way to describe the area, and it had a bit of sly humor.

I have clear memories of living on Ribelle Road with its small, modest homes tucked among a thick grove of coconut palms. Coming out of our south-facing front door, it was turn left and three steps

to the ocean, head straight ahead to the Coconut Rendesvous Club, or turn right and 10 steps to what I now know was Ribelle Road.

My father, Clarence Takeuchi, liked working with wood, and he built furniture and decorative pieces to personalize our simple, rather plain home. In his photograph of the living room looking into the single bedroom, you can see three examples of his handiwork: a bench that serves as a platform for a temple bell, the framed artwork featuring interesting things that washed up on the beach, and a shoji screen that decorated the wall of the bedroom.

And I can't help but smile when I look

at the photograph of my mother reading to my brother and me next to the big expanse of windows facing south. You can make out two homes overlooking the beach, and a thicket of trees. And you can make out Ribelle Road on the right.

This is the last installment of photos taken in the Marshall Islands in the 1950s by my father, Clarence E. Takeuchi. He and my mother, Sachiko Takeuchi, were originally from Hawaii, and employed by the Trust Territory administration for nearly 30 years. They ended their careers at TT headquarters on Saipan, where my father was Special Assistant to the High Commissioner, and my mother was Deputy Director of Personnel.