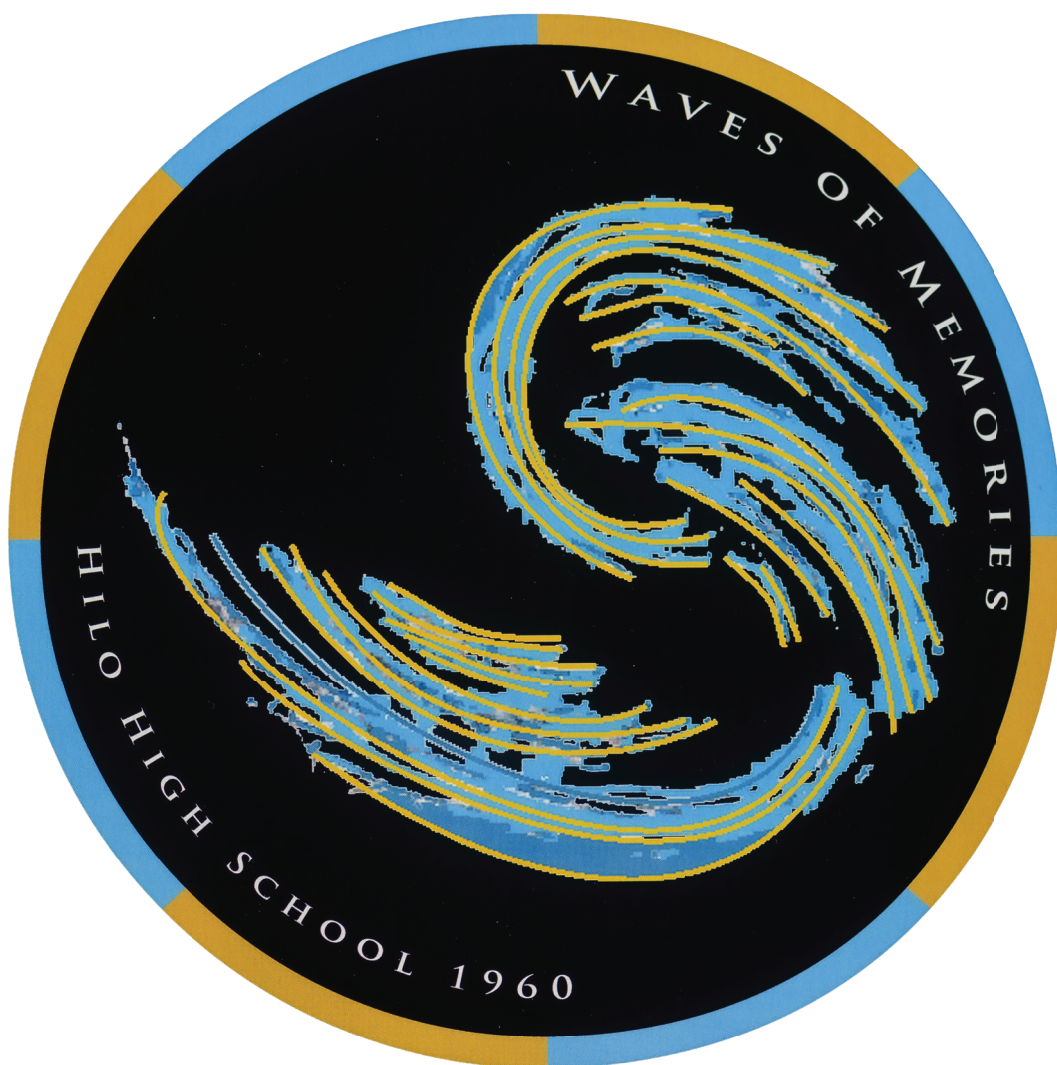


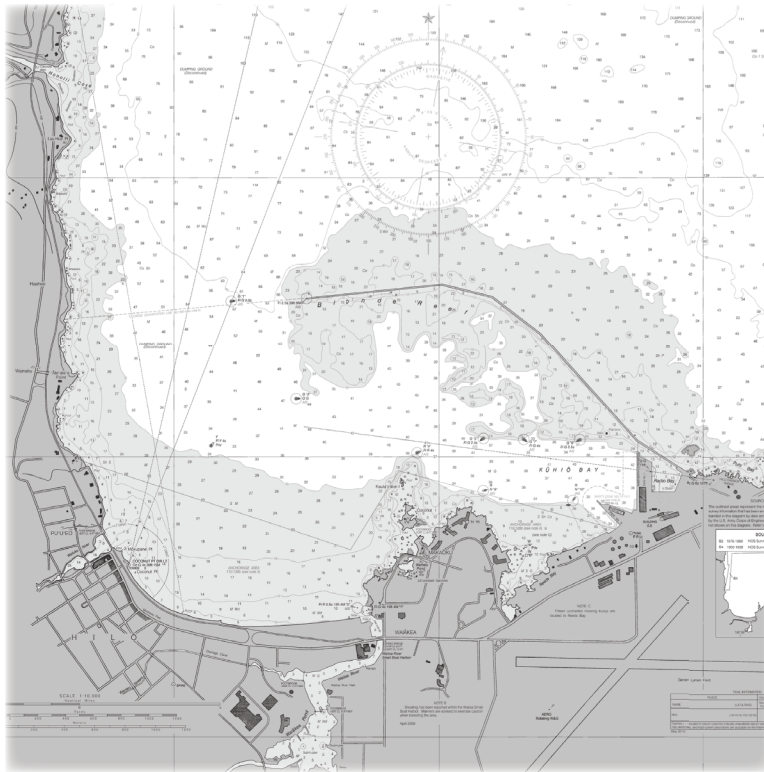
WAVES OF MEMORIES



HILO HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF '60

WAVES OF MEMORIES

THE 1960 TSUNAMI



HILO HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF '60

PROJECT COORDINATORS AND EDITORS

Anna Tatsuhara Honda
Bill Kikuchi
Jane Hayashi Okazaki

INTERIOR DESIGN

Don Mitchell

LOGO DESIGN

Bill Kikuchi

PHOTO CREDITS

Ernest Miki
Donald Tominaga

HILO BAY CHART

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

AUTHOR PICTURES

Hilo High Yearbook, 1960

Waves of Memories©2024 Hilo High Class of 1960

v.20240209

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In nineteen-fifties Hilo, “tidal wave” was used to describe what we now refer to as “tsunami.” But because these memories are meant to reflect the speech and spirit of 1960 Hilo, when a writer used “tidal wave” we have left it as submitted. Similarly, in those days the various pronunciation marks that show how to pronounce Hawaiian words were rarely used; we have left Hawaiian words as the writers submitted them.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
JIMMY ANDREWS	9
CAROL MIKI FUJII	10
DAVID FUSATO	12
BARBARA MASUTANI HILLER	13
AL INOUE	18
JOYCE MURAKAMI ITO	19
ALTHEA MOMI MANUS KAMAU	20
DAVID KAWAMURA	22
BILL "KIKU" KIKUCHI	23
ALBERT KUALII	24
CLARA ANN MAESAKA KURANAKA	26
DON MITCHELL	27
ELLEN YAMASHITA MABUNI	34
ELLEN TSUGAWA MAMIYA	36
JANE HAYASHI OKAZAKI	37
STEVENS OKURA	41
JEAN ARAKI POTTER	44
IRMA (GUILLERMA) GALDONES SUMERA	46
MELVIN TAWARA	47
GLADYS TANIMOTO TOKUOKA	54
BETTY ARAKAWA TOMINAGA	56
JOHN WALKER	57
RODNEY YAMAOKA	60
SHELDON ZANE	61
IT'S A SMALL ISLAND	64

INTRODUCTION

The Hilo High School Class of 1960 was greatly affected by the tsunami that devastated the City of Hilo on May 23, 1960. Our graduation ceremony was to be held on June 7 at the Hilo Civic Auditorium. However, those plans had to be changed to accommodate the chaos caused by the tsunami.

We utilized our school gymnasium, the only other facility available to us, to present to our parents the graduating class of 1960. The seating arrangement was far from ideal, but we had to compromise and deal with the situation. We sincerely wanted to present ourselves in a manner befitting the sacrifices that our parents made, enabling us to graduate from high school and taking the first step into society.

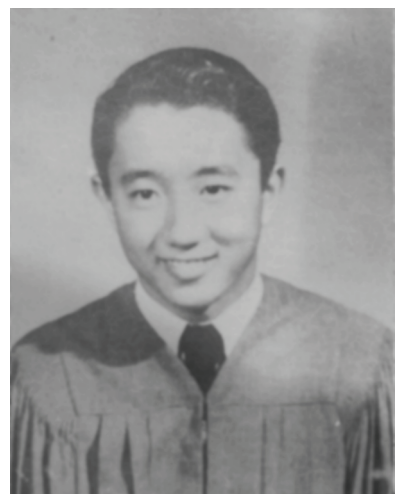
Our Senior Luau, which was our last chance to socialize before leaving on our separate journeys, was also cancelled.

Although we thankfully didn't lose any members of our class, many had to deal with the direct effect of the tsunami. Their homes were either damaged or destroyed. The uncertainty of the future, rebuilding of homes, lives, and livelihood, put those graduates under great stress.

As you read the personal experiences of the graduates that contributed their stories, please realize the true meaning of our class motto, "Ever Onward, Never Backward".

The Hilo High School Tsunami Class of 1960 lives on!

Douglas Segawa, Senior Class President



JIMMY ANDREWS

HENDERSON, NV

On the night of 22 May 1960, Donald Mitchell, Geoffrey Hashimoto and I were assigned by the Civil Air Patrol to assist at the Civil Defense HQ in the Old Armory Building to take measurements every hour down at the waterfront by the old lighthouse.



We had just taken the measurements early on the morning of the 23rd when we noticed that the lights of the ships out at sea that had fled the Hilo Harbor area had disappeared. Little did we know that the incoming tsunami had risen in front of the boats, causing their lights to vanish. We noticed also that the water was rapidly receding and somehow we knew that we could not outrun the incoming wave, so we headed out to the bridge and got as far as the middle when the wave entering the river's mouth actually covered us and the bridge seemed to give way. We all agreed to try and hang on and then if the bridge fell, we were going to simply jump as far away as possible. But the wave subsided and we ran to the Hamakua side.

That started our three or four day ordeal as we helped the Fire Department rescue people in their homes and we actually recovered the last body of an elderly man from the smashed up ruins of several homes. We used a crane to move the lumber away and crawled in and pulled his body out.

We also transported several deceased to the Hilo Morgue at the hospital over the three or four days we were assigned.

Finally, we were released to go home after four days of extremely difficult work, especially for 17 and 18 year old kids.

Years later, in combat in Vietnam, surrounded by dead bodies of both VC and Marines, it was absolutely "normal" and "acceptable" to see such death because we had already experienced such in our beloved home town on 23 May 1960 at 0116 in the early morning.

CAROL MIKI FUJII

WAILUKU, HI

I don't have much memories of the Tsunami except the devastation, shock and sadness, reminiscent of what is currently happening in Lahaina. I asked my brother, Ernest Miki, if he had any Tsunami photos. He found 27 photos, and also a chapter on the tsunami from his memoirs.



I don't know if you consider this input eligible for the project since my brother is a HHS Class of '53. You can decide whether to include it or not. I did edit and fact check my brother's Tsunami Summary and added a paragraph about my post-tsunami experience.

My older sister, Tsukimi, was a friend of the owners of Y. Hata, so she and Carol spent weekends after the tsunami rinsing out yards and yards of fabric in the nearby stream (or canal). The fabric was much cleaner, but the stains remained. It is not known what happened to the fabric and other dry goods in the store.

ERNEST MIKI'S RECOLLECTIONS

Sunday, May 22, 1960. The Orchid Isle Camera Club hosted a photo shoot at Liliuokalani Park. Kodak's Photographer, K. T. Tagawa, from Honolulu also attended. I was attending the University of Hawaii Hilo Branch as a sophomore. It was time for the semester finals, so I left the group before the shoot was over. Our homestead was in Kawainui, eight miles by car to the bridge over the Wailuku River. I did not hear the Tsunami warning siren.

On Monday morning, May 23, 1960, I started my car and was waiting for my youngest sister, Carol, who was a senior at Hilo High School. That's when I heard about the tsunami on the car radio. When we reached Hilo, we could not believe the damage. I dropped off Carol at Hilo High School, and drove to UH Hilo and found out that all classes were canceled.

We weren't allowed to go to the Modern Camera Store, where I worked, so I instead went to Mr. Ralph Kanemori's home (Modern Camera's owner) at 680 Manono Street. All of the staff were there waiting to get clearance

to go down to the store site on Kamehameha Avenue, on the mauka side from Hilo Electric Light, which was the concrete building on the oceanside (Cow Palace). Our building housed a doctor's (pediatrician) office in the middle section, a bar in the section on the town side, while Modern Camera Center had a section on the Puna side. The tsunami swept everything into a canal and the homes on the other side. All that was left was the concrete flooring.

Morgan's Service Station (Kamehameha Ave., facing Hamakua) at the corner of Ponahawai St. and the Hilo Rice Mill (located behind our building) were completely destroyed, too. Agasa Furniture Store, located on the Hamakua side on Kamehameha Ave. and Ponahawai St. was completely decimated.

The adjacent buildings on the Puna side suffered the same fate. The I. Kitagawa lot (the Plymouth auto dealership), the old bowling alley on the second floor, the Hilo Gas Company Store, and the Hilo Hobby Store were all part of the rubble. Brand new Plymouths were smashed, later some of these were seen being driven by new owners, who must have bought them at a huge bargain price.

There was more destruction further toward Waiakea Town, including a DeSoto car dealer (another Chrysler dealership), as well as Motor's Inn (a restaurant). Another victim was the Hilo Boys Club on the Hamakua and mauka side of Kamehameha Ave./Pauahi St. intersection. Muro's (Murota) Auto Repair and a business owned by the Urasaki Family on the Puna side were demolished. The Hilo Theater suffered damages, but the concrete building on the ocean side survived.

The tsunami had entered through the open space of the breakwater, and bounced towards the Waiakea Town area. Waiakea Town was completely destroyed. People had gathered on the Wailoa River Bridge to watch. The Suisan's Fish Auction site was also hit, and when the tsunami got to the Waiakea Electric Light power plant, a loud noise and flash of light caused a blackout. Many spectators on the bridge lost their lives. A sports car raced noisily mauka on Manono Street, locked in first gear!

The bridge to Coconut Island was washed away. Liliuokalani Park suffered major damage, and several sections of the breakwater were damaged. It was an event in which I believe 61 people lost their lives, and the 1960 tsunami tragedy will be remembered for a long time.

DAVID FUSATO

CERRITOS, CA

All of my classmates were enjoying the closure of the school for about two weeks because of the disastrous tsunami.

After the Tsunami hit Hilo town, the National Guard was activated to guard the disaster area. I turned 18 in January, and in February, I joined the National Guard. Three months later, I was activated to be on guard duty with the 299th Infantry Battalion.



When we were activated into the National Guard, we had to sleep in a sleeping bag in the National Guard gymnasium. I also remember there was a narrow road going to the National Guard Compound. Today, there is a new airport and next to the airport road is a nice road going to the compound.

Today, whenever there is any kind of disaster, no one is allowed to go on this road to prevent anyone from getting hurt. After the Tsunami, a lady who owned the camera shop salvaged all the cameras and other equipment that was on the sidewalk and someone stole all of the cameras. Now I realize why there are so many restrictions whenever there are any kind of disasters.



DONALD TOMINAGA

BARBARA MASUTANI HILLER

LANCASTER, CA



Cold, damp. I'm immersed in dark, wet smells: I'm struggling through a dream, trying to surface, but there's roaring and grinding noises, motion, and the dark, dark wet smells; musty smells; gutter smells. My eyes are open, but the nightmare continues. I'm covered: damp, cold, heavy weights on me. My brother, Mike, is shouting in my room...no, his room is downstairs. He's yelling, "I can't breathe. Help! Can't breathe..." and then kicking, smashing sounds near me. A small light coming towards me and my Dad's voice calling, shouting, "Bobbie, Cissie" over and over. It's not real. It can't be real. Please God, let me wake up...and always the dark, wet smells.

I'm answering, calling, telling Dad I'm all right. Mike's somewhere in my room because I hear his voice near mine. "Cissie, Cissie? Answer me, Cissie! Please answer, please...Cissie!"

Wooden boards, debris are being pushed off me, off my bed. We're struggling out: Mike, whose legs are badly gashed; me, with blood on my forehead. No pain. I'm moving in my nightmare: frozen inside my head, waiting to wake up...my body keeps moving.

Dad's searching for Cissie. Mike puts little Stevie, the baby, four years old, on his shoulders. Mike's limping badly but he's the oldest of the boys and the strongest, one year younger than me. I'm helping my mother out of the house, climbing out of the window. She doesn't want to leave. She needs to find Cissie. Larry and Ben go out the window first. It's a second story window but it's a crooked first story window now. Mike passes Stevie to them, climbs down into the water, swings Stevie back on his shoulders. Hurry, hurry...what if another wave comes....

Everything is jumbled. Water surrounds us, and fear...so much fear. The landscape is no longer familiar. There are no trees. All the landmarks are gone. Houses are crammed into each other looking like grotesque paper cutouts. Where's the ocean? Are we heading inland or towards the ocean? My heart is racing: is that water coming in? Fear crowds us. People are crying out around us. My Dad's answering, helping, but we keep going. Dad has ordered us to get to safety. Mama's worrying about Cissie. "She'll be OK, Mama. Daddy will find her." Please, God, let her be OK.

We're wet, moving through thigh-high water, then knee-deep...all barefoot. My brothers are in shorts; my mother in pajamas; I'm in a shortie nightgown that's torn and wet. Nothing matters except getting to high ground. No streets: only water and wreckage.

We're making our way to safety with fear surrounding us. And the dark, wet smells.

This was the tidal wave, the tsunami of May 23, 1960. Generated in Chile, it hit Hilo, Hawaii at 1:05 a.m.

We were Island folk. My parents had both been born in Hilo and had grown up in Waiakea, a fishing village. Our home was near the ocean and I grew up swimming. My Dad was the County Purchasing Agent for the County of Hawaii, my Mom was a housewife, and there were seven of us children. Carole (21), me (18), Mike (16), Lar (14), Ben (13), Cissie (12), and Stevie (4). We had three cats and lived in a big, sprawling house with a wide veranda with a Koa rocker. There were mountain apple trees, lemon trees, orchids, anthuriums, cannas, gardenias, azaleas, and lots of noise and love.

Of the three girls, Carole, a senior at Cornell University, was the smart one. She had been the first National Merit finalist in the state and was Phi Beta Kappa at Cornell. Cissie, really named Constance, was going on 13, a seventh grader at Hilo Intermediate School. She was the pretty one with big double-lidded eyes, long curly eyelashes, and a cute upturned nose. I was the one with lots of hair. I was an A student, a National Merit Letter of Commendation winner and I had a scholarship to Cornell. But, I was noted for my hair.

With Carole away at college, Cissie and I shared the large front bedroom. My parents and Stevie slept in a large middle room, and Larry and Ben shared a small back bedroom. Mike had a bedroom downstairs. Cissie and I had just rearranged the bedroom so her double bed was perpendicular to my double bed, with the head of her bed against a window. The head of my bed rested against a wall in the corner next to another window. This was done just before my 18th birthday party on May 20th. What a lovely day that was with my cousin, Linnie, sleeping over the whole weekend...a fun-filled weekend at the beach. You see, we loved the water; we had grown up always living near the water; tsunamis were a fact of life.

Many tsunamis had occurred before so we knew what to expect. My parents had lived through the devastating 1946 tsunami where many died and the fishing village of Shinmachi on the banks of the Wailoa River was completely wiped out. They were aware of the warning system: initially

there was an alert siren blast notifying the people that a tsunami was on the way; when the wave was approaching the Island, the fire engines stationed in Waiakea would go up and down the streets sounding their sirens before they left for high ground; and the Waiakea residents would also depart. Furthermore, Dad was a member of the Civil Defense Board.

Irony of ironies, he hadn't been informed that a new procedure would be followed. On May 23rd the fire engines of Waiakea pulled out early without sounding a siren. The awaited, familiar signal never came.

My mother had suggested we move to high ground as soon as the initial alert was sounded, but Dad had assured her that he would stay up monitoring the radio updates and listening for the signals. Dad told us to make sure our clothes were ready at the foot of our beds if we had to leave suddenly.

I was a senior at Hilo High School and was working on my last paper, a Philosophy paper on Bertrand Russell due the next day. I remember clearly looking at Cissie sleeping in her bed, watching her sleep, wondering if I should wake her...have her climb into bed with me...but I was still typing my paper. I didn't wake her.

The tsunami hit at 1:05 Monday morning. It was measured at 33 feet at the pier. It was so powerful it uprooted trees and tossed cars and houses around. Cissie was thrown from the house, we think, through the window near the head of her bed. She was missing for three days as we lived with the hope that she'd be found alive. She was found buried under debris on the street. 61 people were killed.

No time to say goodbye; no time to mentally prepare...It had been a freak tsunami. People on high ground had heard the radio announcers say that the tsunami had apparently passed Hilo and the "all clear" blasts would soon be sounded, and those people returned to be caught in the wave. The tsunami did pass Hilo, but it struck Pepeekeo Point and ricocheted back into Hilo Bay, back towards Waiakea.

We stayed with relatives, the Miyaos, up on Iwalani Street. My Mom was in a state of shock, but still cooking and cleaning for everyone; my Dad was everywhere; we kids pitched in to help however we could. My brothers were out clearing and searching with Dad, while I stayed put helping Mom with chores. I hustled and functioned, and never once talked about that night. It wasn't something to talk about. And at night, quiet in bed, I was constantly afraid. I'd think I could hear the ocean and I'd quickly panic, or I'd be summoned again by the dark, wet smells and the cries. I'd keep imagining that some of the cries I'd heard was Cissie's and because

I didn't stay and search she died. But worst of all, I'd keep remembering how I'd almost wakened her to sleep in my bed. One choice, one decision... and she died.

This was 1960 and I was a Japanese girl. You coped. Psychiatrists were for mental institutions, and Japanese would say "*shikataganai*" which loosely translated means "can't be helped", or "you have no control over it." You push guilt aside and keep going. But my guilt wasn't to be pushed aside. My stress response would not turn off. I'd wake at night gasping for breath, my heart racing, my stomach churning, cold, sweaty, and afraid. I'd have a dream: I'd be leading a group of people down a cave-like tunnel, dark and wet. We were escaping or being chased and I'd turn and find someone missing, and I'd have to go back...and I'd waken. My waking hours I'd cram with people and activities, trying to make everything normal again.

I attended my graduation ceremony on June 4th, but all was nothing. We'd lost everything: house, cars, pets, clothes, keepsakes...and Cissie. My life was changed. There was no question of my going to Cornell or even Honolulu. My parents were trying to arrange for a house and cars. I was granted a scholarship to the University of Hawaii in Hilo.

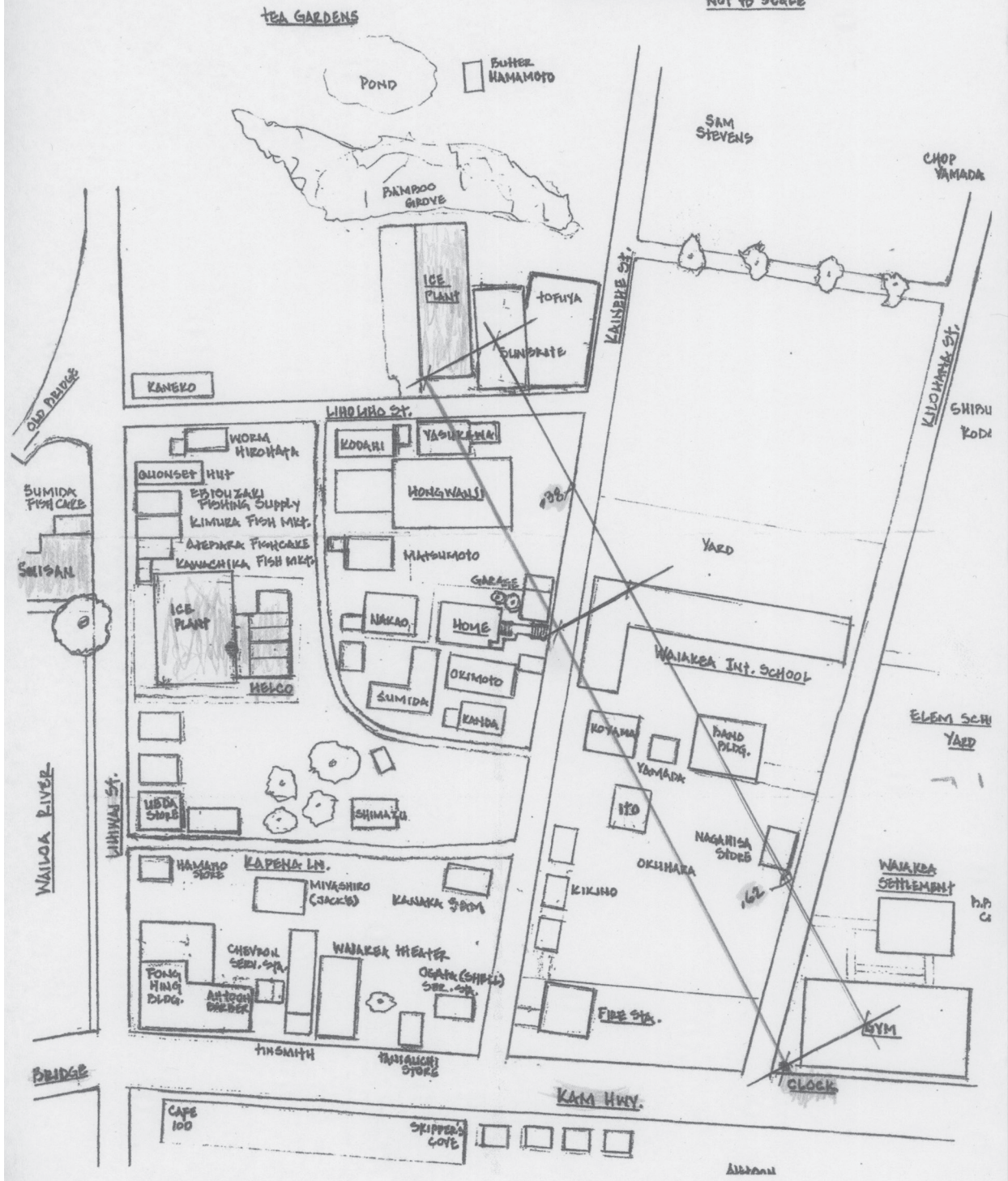
Hilo was a small town and lots of the bright kids would go off to college. At 18, I wanted to leave. I couldn't. My friends left and I felt isolated. Summer saw me with two jobs, one in the college library and the other doing Plant Physiology research for a professor. And time started its healing process.

Each individual is the sum of his experiences. I am who I am because of what I've experienced in my life. There are times when I gladly would have elected to omit events from my life, and yet they did happen and they did have an impact on me. I like to think that I've learned even from the worst of the disasters if nothing else than to be more compassionate, more understanding, more tolerant, kind.

DRAWN BY BEN MASUTANI
 97 KAINEHU ST
 13 YEARS OLD IN 1960
 → EXISTING BLDGS, STS, ETC. (AS OF 1960)

WAIAXEA TOWN (CIRCA 1958)

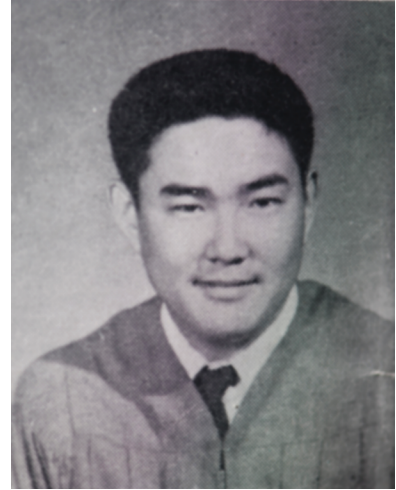
NOT TO SCALE



MAP OF WAIAXEA TOWN (BEN MASUTANI)

AL INOUE

HILO, HI



I was just Manono side of the Wailoa Bridge across the old Buddhist temple when the big wave hit. I saw those who were on the bridge start running in panic. Behind them was a huge mountain of brown water. There were loud explosions as power lines were dropping in the downtown area. There were also a series of explosions at the Helco plant. I ran up Manono Street inland. I tried to cross Manono to the mauka side of the street but almost got hit by cars fleeing the area. The roar of the sound of carnage and power lines whipping behind me is still embedded in my mind. I could have been injured or drowned by the wave, electrocuted, or hit by the exiting cars.

In the morning I walked to what was downtown Waiakea and was shocked that it was gone. So was our old school and many residences. I also walked to the Shinmachi area and toward town. The old Kwong See Wo building on Mamo Street was mostly unrecognizable. The night before, I had visited Jimmy Lee, who ran the store, to help him move things to high shelves or to the second floor. I asked him if the shelves were high enough. He said the '46 wave was only about 4 feet high. Next morning the building was gone.

Another tsunami experience that may be of interest: I was only 4 years old but have occasional flashbacks of the 1946 Tsunami. I lived with my parents on Kam Ave in a two story building makai of a Coca Cola bottling plant. My cousin carried me between waves to the plant that was the only two story concrete building in the area. My father met us there. I recall seeing several rail tanker trailers lying on their sides on the railway next to the beach railway system. While safely at the plant, on one of the wave recessions, my father saw a young girl caught in debris near the building and rescued her. She had lost all her clothing so they dressed her in a make shift burlap bag. I remember thinking how uncomfortable the bag felt to her.

Years later, I was visiting the Pacific Tsunami Museum and saw her testimony on tape. She used to live in Laupahoehoe. I tried to contact her but learned she had passed away five years earlier. Sad.

JOYCE MURAKAMI ITO

BEAVERTON, OR

Living in Mt. View, the memories of the tsunami are brief but impactful. Our family of 11 suddenly blossomed to 14 as my aunt, uncle and cousin came to live with us. Their home in Hilo was destroyed as they fled the tsunami.

Stunned by the loss of a few schoolmates, we went through our graduation in the gymnasium.

My father lost his job with the Hilo Electric Company and had to find another job elsewhere. As teens, we relied on our parents to take care of us. Higher education loomed ahead and life went on.

Today, we are 80 years old and reflect on the past with respect and awe. Our elders are now deceased and we are carrying on with our lives, hoping that another disaster will not demolish Hilo again.



MOOHEAU BUS DEPOT (ERNEST MIKI)

ALTHEA MOMI MANUS KAMAU

KANEOHE, HI

In May 1960, I lived on Kilauea Avenue, across from Kapiolani School and adjacent to a vacant lot that was home to the Fernandez cow. Beyond the lot and the few homes along the roadway was the Waiakea River, commonly known now as the Wailoa River. The dirt road between my home and the lot led to the abandoned Waiakea Sugar Mill Plantation dock. Until the Mill closed, this site was actively used to load barges with raw sugar bound for the Hilo wharf and elsewhere.



Tension was high that night and sleep fitful. My father was on the front porch most of the evening watching the river. When the wave hit the power plant, the sky lit up with a huge explosion. Minutes, or possibly seconds later, the white crest of the wave was visible traveling up the river towards the dock. Dad yelled at us to run. We were barefoot in nightclothes, dad in his BVDs, running up Kilauea Avenue with many other people. Everyone appeared frightened.

At daybreak, we discovered that the wave had traveled far into the lot and the dirt road. Debris was deposited along our stone wall. Our backyard still had standing water. The neighbors behind us had much more water and debris but were safe. The poor cow had drowned. We lived with the stench of decaying flesh for many days.

I don't remember much about the days after the wave. We did not sightsee or view the damage. Sadness was pervasive. Nearby Piopio Street, where I had spent many happy days at my grandmother's home, was gone, as was our favorite saimin stand. It was a safe street for kids and evening walks for my sister and me.

What I do remember most vividly was Hilo Memorial Hospital and its morgue. As a member of the Candy Strippers (a.k.a future nurses) I volunteered at the hospital. I reported to help the next day. The hospital was chaotic. I was assigned to staff the front desk to assure visitors arrive at their correct destinations. It became clear that my major job was to help people find missing family members and loved ones. This entailed checking all of the patient lists and calling wards if necessary. If all attempts were unsuccessful, the last option was a visit to the morgue if families consented.

The morgue was a small building behind the hospital across a paved roadway and parking area. The number of deaths had surpassed the morgue capacity [I am assuming] so bodies were laid out on the pavement, covered, with tags on their toes for identification. Families had to walk thru the back area of the hospital, exiting to the scene of the bodies out on the pavement.

Families had to view each deceased person in their search. I remained with the families throughout the process. I did not know any of the families, but I felt their grief and cried many tears with them. I still remember that day as one of the saddest in my life.

On a happier note, I did help one family to connect with a missing son, who had been in surgery when they came to the hospital earlier in the day. When I returned the next day, this duty was thankfully assigned to a hospital nurse.

Thinking about this experience brought up an older memory. A year or so prior to this wave was another tidal wave alert. Dozens of us gathered around the canal towards the end of Piopio Street (the same street that was destroyed in 1960) to watch for a wave. Thankfully, that wave was just inches and never overflowed the canal. My younger sister and I were among the very very stupid but very very lucky onlookers who escaped disaster that day. I have never ignored a warning since 1960.



HILO THEATER (ERNEST MIKI)

DAVID KAWAMURA

MILILANI, HI

My name is David Kawamura, 1960 graduate of Hilo High School. This is a recap of the 1960 Tsunami as best as I can recall and remember. At that time in 1960, my family and I lived at 160 Luka Street. This location is adjacent to Waiakea Kai Elementary near the SHOP (just at the end of the elementary school). This shop was utilized by Hilo High School and it was an old style military warehouse for a wood shop class for the high school.



On the night when the tsunami hit Hilo in 1960, I remember that although there was a warning, it was canceled. We lived in a 2-story house, and later on that night I noticed that some boxes of vanda plants started moving around like they started to float.

At that time, I had my sister and grandmother jump into the family car and I drove past the SHOP and went to the Sure Save parking lot and started to drive towards Kilauea Avenue to go towards Kaumana, where my brother and sister-in-law lived.

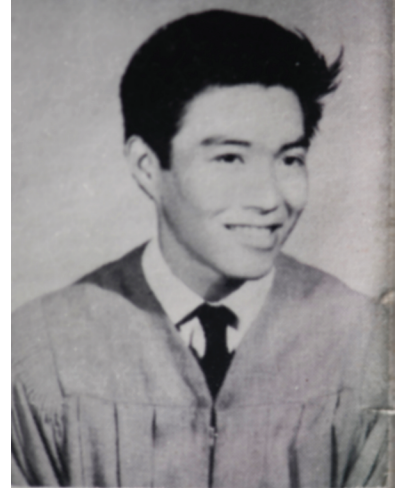
As we were driving towards our destination, I could see sparks flying in the night sky. This I presumed was the Hilo Electric power plant shorting out from the tsunami water rushing in.

In the meantime, my father used the other car to try and warn the other neighbors. Later on that night my father told me that he got caught in front of Nagahisa Store when he tried to get out. After the water receded, he was able to get out of the car, and walked up the road past Sure Save, and was able to catch a ride from somebody to come up to Kaumana where the rest of the family was.

This is what I can remember of what had transpired on that night.

BILL "KIKU" KIKUCHI

HILO, HI



SUNDAY, MAY 22, 1960 - I worked at Richard's Service Station, located on the mauka corner of Waianuenue Avenue and Kinoole Street. Throughout the day, I listened to the radio of places being impacted by the waves generated by the Chilean earthquake. Tahiti reported 3 foot waves, and Christmas Island 1 foot, which to us, were small. After having my last cup of coffee at May's Fountain/Goya Brothers, located at the corner of Kamehameha Avenue and Bishop Street, I went home.

MONDAY, MAY 23, 1960 - When I got up and looked at the clock, it read minutes after 1:00 a.m. It had stopped when the electricity went out. I asked my mom why she didn't get me up for school. She told me about the tsunami and the devastation in Hilo. I reported to Hilo Hongwanji on Kilauea Avenue as a post disaster volunteer. Roger Kishimoto and I teamed up and conducted a search of Kimiville. Towards the end of the day, we were by the former Kadota Liquors, near Ruddle's, where Long's Downtown is now. We saw a hand protruding from the rubble, and found someone who had died in the tsunami. That evening I received a call from Neil "Dizzy" Mizuba. He was fingerprinting the dead in a room at the back section of Hilo Memorial Hospital, and asked if I wanted to trade jobs with him.

One day, around my birthday in early June, I was registering with the selective service, and I noticed another recruit whose arm was in a cast. I recall that his last name was Dela Cruz, who then related how he and his uncles, the Omega brothers, were sitting on the platform of the Cow Palace to watch the waves. In the darkness, they heard the tsunami. He ran, but was hit by the wave on Kumu Street. When the water receded, his body wrapped around a utility pole, and his arm was injured by the receding force. The Omega brothers were victims of the tsunami.

I've camped many nights on the shore, such as on a 5 days and nights trek from Keahole to Puako with friends in the early 80's. Hearing the sounds of the waves in the darkness of night brings Hilo to my mind.

ALBERT KUALII

PAHOA, HI

“Beneath the tropic skies of Hilo stands dear ole Hilo High School,” yes, I, Albert Kualii, was ecstatic to share my views of the “waves of memories,” whose epistemology are candid.

Without question, three events happened during my senior year at Hilo High School which made me aware of how unpredictable and cruel Mother Nature can be, as well as, the beauty in Her transformation during and after Her panoramic display.

To begin, these individuals, George Tanabe, Melvin Lai, and Alan Baptiste, may their souls rest in peace, were with me, and I thought it to be appropriate to mention them as co-writers of what I have written. They were my best of friends, and we were like “the three musketeers.” On weekends, we spent time at each other’s homes, where our parents would cater our meals as we enjoyed each other’s company.

When Kilauea Iki erupted, the four of us went to the Volcano area to witness this event. I remember that it was very cold outside, but Melvin’s car was equipped with a heater, thus kept us warm.

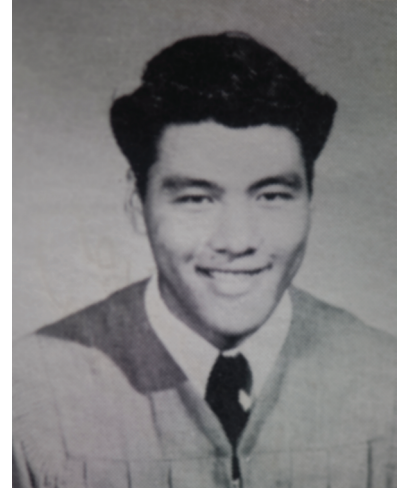
There were so many spectators and limited parking space, therefore, you had to walk a great distance from where you parked your vehicle to the eruption site.

In view of this situation, we went to a place called “Bird’s Park.” We still could see the glow and hear the roaring of the eruption. (This is where I had my first taste of coffee, as Melvin brought along a thermos of hot coffee, and it warmed my inners.)

The Kapoho eruption was another escapade we encountered. Our intent was to witness the lava flow and make a souvenir of the lava.

There were road blocks monitored by the Civil Defense and police department to keep the public from entering into these danger zones. Therefore, we had to find another route to gain access to the lava flow.

We eventually found an entry to the lava flow and had to improvise a way to create our souvenir. We used our shirts as heat shields to protect our faces from the tremendous heat from the flow and a guava tree branch for the ladle to scoop the molten lava. Mission accomplished.



In hindsight of our ordeal, it was our juvenile motivation that outweighed our rational thinking about the consequences of our misdeed.

Finally, the Tsunami will remain vivid within my memories. Even though my parents' home was not within the danger zone, my parents had a lot of empathy for those who lost their homes, possessions, and even loved ones. My Dad was an electrician employed by the Flinkote Co. and had a lot of co-workers living in the danger zone.

After the tsunami destroyed the bay front area of Hilo, including Sun Sun Lau and Motor's Inn restaurants, the bowling alley, Hilo Theater, Boys' Club, Dodo Mortuary, and many more, my dad had to get a permit to gain access to help his friends who lived in this disaster area.

He helped many of them salvage their possessions and transport them to other locations for safekeeping.

My parents' home had a huge patio that State Senator Abe and State Rep. Hara used as their campaign headquarters. My dad had it equipped with a kitchen, BBQ area, a bar, restroom, as well as a dining area.

When the tsunami destroyed the homes of his friends, he opened the kitchen area to feed them.

The Civic Auditorium was used by the Red Cross to help the victims of the tsunami, thus we held our graduation at the High School gym.

To the Hilo High School Class of 1960, my condolences to those who passed, and my humble greetings to those who are living, may their days be filled with joy and best of health.



I KITAGAWA AUTO (ERNEST MIKI)

CLARA ANN MAESAKA KURANAKA

PEARL CITY, HI

I remember that I had to go to the Fire Station to volunteer for a while — they found people who didn't make it. I assisted by answering phone calls. My Uncle & his family lived above the Mamo Theater at that time and had to run up the hill to the top of Mamo Street to Kinoole Street for safety — their building had collapsed onto the street.



I recall that the wave went through the whole Bayfront & Hilo Theater. People living on Piopio Street lost their homes - also Waiakea Town too. Downtown Hilo was hit hard.

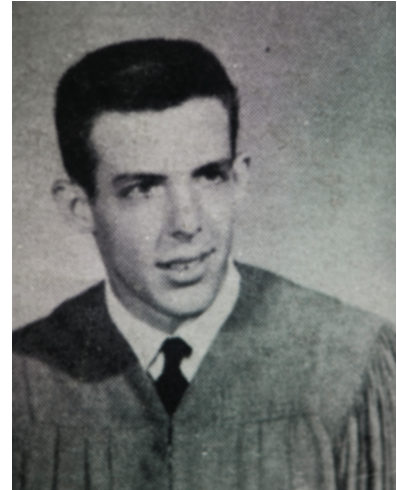


HILO IRON WORKS (DONALD TOMINAGA)

DON MITCHELL

FREEVILLE, NY

My mother used to call me every May 23rd, the anniversary of the tsunami which devastated our town. The call was a reminder of my own mortality, because encoded in it were my first brushes with death: when I was nearly killed through my own foolishness, and then, not an hour later, when I began rescuing people who were already dead.



May twenty-third, 1960, was a Monday. I had spent the weekend doing archaeology at a cave of refuge out in the Ka'u Desert, making maps, living out of the back of an old GMC delivery van I borrowed from my father's business. I was still in high school, but had gone out to work with some college students. We camped out together, but decorously, girls on one side of the van, boys on the other. No one seemed to care that boys and girls, un-chaperoned, were going into the Ka'u Desert to map a cave. It made me feel very adult, though I was only sixteen.

On the way back we'd been listening to the radio and heard about an earthquake in Chile. Everybody knew that might mean trouble. In one of the little towns we drove through, the warning sirens were already sounding. We all understood how dangerous it was, being surrounded by an enormous ocean, flanked east and west by continents where things happened that could kill you.

Same to the north, where the icicles on the old man's beard had sent shock waves our way before. The last killer tsunami had arrived from there in 1946, in the morning about seven, on April Fool's Day, of all dates. Our family had friends who were lost. The mother and her kids were killed while she was on the phone with her husband, who had gone to work early, and when the warning sirens went off he called to tell her to run. Our family legend is that when the wife said *April Fool yourself!* the husband heard the wave hit, heard it briefly on the telephone before the lines went down, the instrument and his family both dead. The reality was uglier than the legend. The kids were never found; the husband was briefly unbalanced and then quit his job and went back to the mainland.

As I'm thinking about this in 2019, I have questions. I know my mother told me this story, but I wonder how much of it was accurate and how

much was hearsay — particularly the telephone conversation. I'll never know.

After I got back from the Ka'u Desert, I went down to Civil Defense, which was at the Armory in those days. I was a radio operator; this was long before communications satellites, when even our telephone connections with the Mainland were by radio. No one knew what Chile was sending our way; there had been no destructive tsunami since 1946 – just a little one in 1957, that tossed a few fishing boats up on the shore – so I suppose we were all complacent. There might be nothing at all beyond an unusually high tide.

We warmed up the old Hallicrafters receiver, lit up the war-surplus transmitter, and got crackling reassuring reports from elsewhere in the Pacific: Tahiti, nothing; Christmas Island (now Kiribati), only six inches. There was nothing between us and Chile, but we thought that the South Pacific would give us clues, since the shock, spreading in a great arc, would pass through there first.

That's what we thought, but we were wrong. We didn't know what the seismologists up at the volcano observatory knew, which was that even a six inch rise at Christmas was ominous, and they didn't know what we knew, which was that there had been that six inch rise. Collectively all we knew was that if anything was coming, it would arrive around one in the morning.

Jimmy Andrews, Geoffrey Hashimoto and I left the radios and went down to the shore to watch for the tsunami. Nobody told us not to. We were apprehensive but not scared, because of Christmas Island. We picked up some long sticks that had washed up on the rocks so we could mark the wave heights by shoving them into the embankment. We thought that later on somebody might want to know.

We should have known that government monitoring stations were in operation – had been for years. But it seemed exciting to be getting ready to collect data. I think we got started with the sticks to avoid thinking about how we had no genuine reason to be down at the shore at all.

The first wave was small, nothing more than a rapid high tide, not even as frightening as a tidal bore. It wasn't recognizable as a wave at all, but it triggered the automatic warning sirens, which began low moaning and then wailing. We didn't need a warning; we already knew what was happening. A few minutes later we marked the second, which washed a foot or two higher.

By then it was after one AM, and when instead of moving water we realized we were looking at the deep lumpy black of the bay's floor, we were transfixed. The ocean was being sucked out. We stood and watched. We

scrambled a little higher on the embankment so we could see better out into the bay. We waited.

Even now I can't really figure out what kept us from running. All I can remember from that time – it must have been less than a minute – is the feeling that I had to stay there and see what was going to happen. Later, when my mother asked why I had done such a foolish thing, I could only say that I didn't know, and that was the truth. I didn't. I still don't, not really. So I stood there at what had been the high water mark, now land, waiting for something to happen.

The next thing I could see was a wall of water that seemed to jump up from nowhere, coming at us faster than I had ever imagined. I knew, I had read, I had had it drilled into me, that tsunami would do fifty or sixty miles per hour near shore, but I had never thought about what that meant, about how much time I'd have to react. It was barely enough.

We looked each other and started running up the embankment, away from our bravely planted sticks, heading inland. But I realized it would take us from the rear if we did, and I shouted "bridge, bridge" and we turned and ran along the embankment and out over the Wailuku River, onto a metal landing-mat bridge that had replaced the concrete one destroyed on April Fool's Day, 1946. That's the one everybody calls the Singing Bridge now.

We ran towards the high ground on the other end of the bridge and we didn't make it. I doubt we had more than fifteen seconds to do what we did – decide, run – and the wave hit when we were half way across, surging under and through the bridge, coming up around our knees, we grabbed the metal railing and screamed the way you would on a roller coaster, except that none of us had ever been on a roller coaster. I screamed because I believed I was about to die.

We held on to the railing facing the bay, and to our right we saw the wave hump up, we saw this from the back, and because our town was built in a crescent and we were at one of the tips, we saw the wave slam into it. The noise was tremendous.

The power plant blew up and the lights went out.

The bridge bucked and heaved but it held. Even now I can hear the metal creaking and groaning, and I can feel salt water splashing my face. That was a surprise: the slap of cold, fully salty water which should have been brackish, warm, and thirty feet below me.

After a minute, maybe less, the rushing sea dropped below the bridge deck, and we let go and ran to the other side. Some men who had been

watching cursed us for crazy kids. “You real stupid, play with da wave like dat,” one yelled angrily, and the others hugged us, slapped us on the back, kept asking us if we were all right. An old Japanese man pointed his finger at us and then out towards the bay, and said, “Lucky you folks no die, you know? No can forget dis. Lucky you no die.”

Sometime in the late 1990s, when I was living in Buffalo, I ran into a woman who said that her father had been in Hilo at the time. She asked him if he’d seen kids on the bridge and he said he had been, and then, “So now I know who those idiots were.” I kind of liked that, actually.

We crossed the Pueo bridge to our cars, and drove away. I went out along the coast to wake up an amateur radio operator I knew. I felt important and adult, honking my horn to wake him and telling him to get his generator and his radio going and call Honolulu for help. He didn’t even bother asking whether the inter-island telephones still worked.

Then I drove home and said to my parents, who were on the porch looking, wondering what had happened, “It’s bad, it’s bad. I think it’s all gone. I’m gonna try to rescue people.” I didn’t tell them about the bridge until much later.

“Be careful,” my mother said, “another one might come.”

I went into my father’s shop, got an axe and a crow bar, and drove back downtown to meet the others at Civil Defense. We went over to the main fire station. Somebody passed out red hard hats. We put them on, drove to where the worst destruction was, and began.

In the early-hours bravado we called ourselves the Rescue Squad. By dawn we knew there was no hope, there could be no one left for us to rescue. Everybody we found was dead. We kept at it for four days anyway, but never found anybody alive.

It’s only after earthquakes and building collapses that survivors last for days. A tsunami either mangles and crushes you in your house or pins you down just long enough to drown you. It’s in and out in a couple of minutes at most, but that’s enough time to kill you if you can’t get free. If you’re swept cleanly away, if you’re sucked back out to sea on flotsam or jetsam, you might survive to be found later, maybe clinging to a door, or hanging over a dresser drawer. The shock waves will have rushed on, the sea will have calmed itself, and you’re likely to be rescued from gentle swells.

We found our friend K’s mother in the first couple of hours, in a collapsed house. We wouldn’t have seen her at all except that her leg was sticking out from what had been her porch. When we heaved the porch up and got her out she was pale, even peaceful, in her nightgown. There was a

little blood on her leg but she was otherwise unmarked. She had almost gotten out into the street, where maybe she could have caught something and survived.

Where's K? we asked each other, even though we'd already poked under the house enough to be sure nobody else was there. We said this looking around as if any minute he'd come out from his room and help us with his mom. His room was smashed and his mother dead and we had her body, and we didn't know where he was, but we said this thing to each other anyway, as if we had dropped by and were waiting for him to come home from school.

She had been drowned, not crushed; so strange to realize it: drowned, but here, inland. The sea was back where it belonged, two hundred yards away. K's mother was the first dead body I had ever seen that hadn't been embalmed, painted, dressed and put in a casket. Hers was the first newly-dead one I'd ever seen. It was the first one I'd ever touched, and she was cold the way everybody said bodies were, but she was smooth, too. The cool smoothness of her arms and legs has stayed with me. The sudden movement of her foot in my grasp as her body sagged when we lifted her has never left me, nor has the feeling of fear that it would slip from my hand and I would drop her, and she would be hurt.

Somebody, the police or maybe Civil Defense, had organized the little open-air buses and their drivers, pressing them into service as ambulances and hearses. I don't know how they did it so quickly. The buses were called *sampans* and even then I caught the irony. *Sampan* was the name for fishing boats that left the Wailoa River every night, motored past the end of the breakwater, where the tiger sharks were, and on to open sea. Sampans stayed out all night, returning at dawn with their catch. At the early morning auctions the fish were laid out in rows and the bidders walked among them, choosing. Some fish would still be alive, flopping on the concrete floor, but most would be dead. The iridescent blue-green *mahimahi* faded as they drowned, but the others stayed the same colors.

We lifted K's mother's body into a sampan that a policeman called for us. We laid her out on the floor on her back, because it seemed wrong to put her in face-down. But that meant we had to look at her. The driver, an old Filipino man, headed for the morgue at the hospital. All of us had been born at that hospital, which was a couple of miles out of town, up on the bank of the Wailuku near Rainbow Falls. I can't remember who started it, but suddenly we were making fun of the driver, who was shaking with fear of K's mother's dead body. We must have known he

didn't deserve this from us, but then we didn't deserve to be sitting on leatherette bus seats around the body of our friend's mother in her nightgown.

We were in an open bus before dawn with a dead body we'd found, and we didn't know how to behave. We looked at each other, grinned, and teased him. "Shake-Shake," we called to him, "Hey, Shake-Shake, baim'bai we go back downtown for get moah dead folks." He laughed a high-pitched old man Filipino laugh, and kept on driving, shaking. I was trembling myself. I think we all were. We agreed it was from the cold but we all knew better. Even in these extreme circumstances, we didn't like admitting to each other that we were frightened and unsure of ourselves.

When we were about halfway to the hospital, somebody said we should let Shake-Shake alone. We fell silent. I was a little ashamed that I hadn't been the one to make us stop. I felt around under my seat and found a rolled-up mat somebody must have forgotten, and tried to cover K's mother with it. Opened the long way it wouldn't sit properly on her, so I turned it and covered her chest and face with it. I think we all felt better after that.

At the morgue one of the orderlies looked at us, shook his head, and said, "You folks only kids. No good you do dis." That gave us some strength, and with it pride, which is probably what he meant it to do. We were a Rescue Squad, and had to get back to it. We'd taken our catch up the hill, and unloaded it. Experienced now, we got in Shake-Shake's sampan and went out for more.

Our high school graduation had to be postponed not just because of the crisis, but because of a practical issue. The Hilo Civic Auditorium where the graduation was to be had been seriously damaged, though not destroyed. We had our graduation two weeks late in the high school gym, the site of proms, of fast and slow dancing, the site of the Big Island Interscholastic Federation basketball championships.

I sat on the gym floor in my crepe gown and tasseled hat and my fragrant *maile* lei, along with all the other seniors. Some of the other Rescue Squad kids were there. Our friend was too. We had found ourselves avoiding K when school resumed, which was easy because he avoided us too. I told myself this was probably the best thing, and let it go.

The Guidance Counselor wrote a letter to the paper praising us, and criticizing Civil Defense for having made boys do the work of men. But

we had no complaint. We wanted to sit together at graduation, but the Guidance Counselor couldn't arrange that. It had to be alphabetic.

Even so, I felt a sense of completion afterwards, a feeling that today I'd call closure. It was important to have that graduation. I think the town saw it as a sign of recovery, of hope perhaps, maybe even an affirmation: our seniors graduate no matter what.

Down in what used to be Waiakea Town, there's a memorial for the 1960 tsunami. It's the town's pedestal clock, green metal pillar and a big white face, which was ripped from its base and washed half a mile up the Wailoa River. It stopped at one-oh-three, hands almost together, and it's been left that way, cracked glass and all. They put it back on its stand, near the sampan landing.

Sometimes I drive down to that clock, and I stand with it for a few minutes. I know the passers-by think I'm just another tourist, because that's what I look like. They see an old bald haole guy looking at their clock. Just standing, looking. It doesn't bother me that they can't know what I'm remembering.

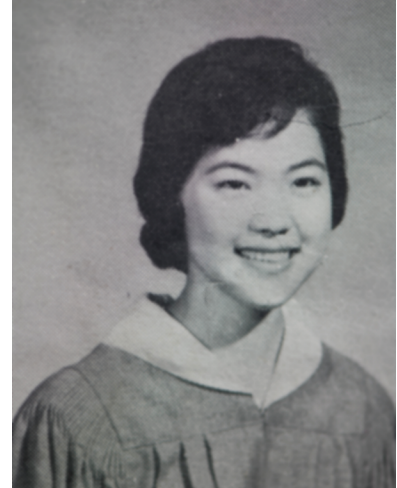
Every time I walk over the Singing Bridge I put my hand on the railing and I can feel the water splashing on it. Splashing on my legs. Not drowning me.



MURA'S REPAIR SHOP (ERNEST MIKI)

ELLEN YAMASHITA MABUNI

*(posthumously, by permission of her daughter
Lianne Mabuni-Passmore)*



I was born in Waiakea Town, Hilo, Hawai'i on May 30, 1942. My parents were born in Hawaii. Mother in Wainaku and Father in Hilo. Mother's family had a store, Yonemoto Store, in Wainaku, and the building is still there. I was one of eleven children, five brothers and five sisters, plus me. Being the baby had its advantages but also hampered my decision-making ability.

Luckily, my husband, Earl, is a good decision maker. I went to Waiakea Kai Elementary, Intermediate, and Hilo High School. I graduated in 1960. That year the tsunami hit Hilo. My father worked down at the wharf, as a mechanic (HT&T) so he drove home to warn us. My oldest sister and mother stayed behind because Mother was disabled from a stroke. Luckily, they were saved by the fire department. My older sister and I ran but were caught in the wave up to our chins. My nightgown wrapped around and I couldn't move. It was very scary. We saved ourselves by climbing on top of a truck.

After high school, I went to Honolulu Business College. I lived with my sister who worked for Hawaiian Airlines. After graduating as a secretary, I worked for an advertising agency, and later for TCA. My best girlfriend invited me to go riding in her sister's boyfriend's friend's new car. It turned out to be Earl, my future husband. I think it was love at first sight. After meeting for lunch every day, we married in a simple church family wedding. Earl worked as a draftsman for the Honolulu Water Supply. Later on he became an inspector for the Planning Department doing shoreline management work. I went to work for the University at the Department of Tropical Agriculture. I had the best boss in the world. After retiring from that job, I became an Allstate agent.

Earl and I made a family with two boys and a girl. My youngest son, Michael, lives in Tokyo with his family. My daughter, Lianne, lives on Oahu with her family. Eric, our oldest, lives in Hilo. Earl and I moved to Hilo and bought a home in Kaumana as we're originally from here. Earl and I traveled to Europe and often to Las Vegas.

Recently, I became a member of HIAC. I enjoy it very much and it gives Earl a break. I enjoy the excursions and talking with people. The staff is

wonderful. I learned to love crossword puzzles from my tablemate, Mary. Stay healthy, exercise, laugh a lot, and keep in touch with friends and family. That's my philosophy.



PONAHAWAI ST (ERNEST MIKI)



DONALD TOMINAGA

ELLEN TSUGAWA MAMIYA

ANAHEIM, CA

I don't have too much to say about the tsunami.. I remember getting up in the middle of the night hearing sirens, and that my dad was not at home.

He worked for The Hawaii Times. In the morning he told me there was a tidal wave. I volunteered at the Hilo Public Library, which was turned into a Red Cross Center for clothes, etc.

I knew that the boys who belonged to the Civil Air Patrol had to help look for tidal wave victims.

The tsunami spoiled our graduation exercise big time.



DONALD TOMINAGA

JANE HAYASHI OKAZAKI

HILO, HI

REMEMBERING WAIAKEA KAI SCHOOL

In May of 1960, I was not then fully aware of many of the details and aspects of the devastating effects of the tidal wave that hit Hilo. My parents did not allow us to venture anywhere near the areas of destruction, although in actuality, the bog area which is now in the vicinity of the boat landing at Wailoa River, was where some victims were found, and it was very close to my home. Waters were likely stopped from reaching us by the Canec plant that fronted our house, and by the overgrown bushes covering the old railroad tracks along Mililani Street. Back then, we probably only learned about things by word of mouth, the radio news, the newspaper, or hearing about what my dad saw as he helped with the clean up at his workplace, American Factors, then located in or near the former Cow Palace. They wholesaled canned grocery items back then. After the destruction, my dad was transferred to the company's lumber yard.



In reflecting back, some of my good friends were severely inundated by the waves, and I now realize that at the time, without mobile phones or cars to drive around like today's teens, it was difficult to reach out to my friends, much less know where they were sheltered after Waiakea Town was wiped out. I have not seen a number of affected friends since high school. When some of us reconnected years later, somehow, there was little discussion of the tidal wave and its effects. No one asked, and no one told. I've wondered about that.

In empathy towards those peers who had lost just about everything, we graduated in muumuus or pedal pushers under our gowns two weeks after the waves hit. Anyway, my potential party dresses were at the seamstress's home in the "Upgrades" area, which was destroyed. Many of us had one lei, if any, from our parents, rather than the lei bedecked graduates we often see. A classmate recently recalled that our graduation speaker in the old gym was the then newscaster Wayne Collins, who spoke of our remaining here and becoming pillars of our island community.

I left Hilo shortly after graduation to spend some time on Oahu before going to Los Angeles to get an early start to find an apartment near Los Angeles City College for Marge Ogata, my roommate, who got to LA after

her summer cannery job was over, and myself, and I did not return to Hilo for two years.

What I do recall is the sadness in learning that Waiakea Kai School, with its most beautiful campus, was completely destroyed. Many of us spent ten of our early years there, yet none of it remains, gone...along with records of our ever having been there. My brother, who was 10 at the time, lamented the passing of Miss Camara, the cafeteria manager, who was one of the wave victims, because there would be no more of her unique menus. I used to be impressed by what the teachers were served. Some of what I remember were cone sushi, nishime, holiday dishes, and the mouth watering specialty pies. Teacher lunches of my time were larger portions of student lunches.

On school days, we were normally dropped off at the crosswalk where we crossed Kamehameha Avenue to the corner of the gymnasium, with the green clock facing us, so we knew how much time we had before the school bell rang. We walked along the sidewalk on Kilohana Street past the Waiakea Settlement YMCA, with Nagahisa Store across the street, then along a row of pink or yellow shower trees, and entered the campus at the crosswalk between the elementary and intermediate schools. Often, with the Hilo rain, we were happy to be dropped off there instead.

We then walked on a long, elevated concrete walkway in the middle of the elementary campus. It had a tall flagpole midway to the entrance of the elongated U-shaped building. Anyone in the classrooms facing the front yard could easily see those who were tardy, for they'd be walking the length of the walkway. Under the classroom windows were bright yellow day lilies.

The left side of the building housed the 2nd and 3rd grades, with a perpendicular wing with 1st and Kindergarten classrooms. The office was in the center of the building, with grades 5 and 6 across the hall. The right side housed the library, grades 3 and 4, and a dispensary with a dental hygienist chair. Across an overpass was the wing where the cafeteria, kitchen, and storage room were located.

To the far left of the yard, while facing the school, was the boys' restroom (separate building), and to the far right was the girls' bathroom. In both, the front part was for lower elementary students, and the back with larger stalls were for upper elementary students. Somewhere fronting each bathroom building were long troughs with a long metal pipe above it, with holes along it for group hand washing before lunch or teeth brushing. A knob at one end turned the water on. The teachers' parking garage,

entered from Kamehameha Avenue, across from the Sure Save building, via a circular driveway, was behind the girls' bathroom and the Settlement director's home.

The front yard was so spacious that the elaborate May Day program for the entire school could be held on just the right side, between the flagpole and the Settlement. There was a May pole, a royal court, and ethnic dances. In the event of rain, the program was held on the back lanai. The backyard was spacious as well. The grassy area fronting the lanai was large enough to play kickball. The area fronting the Kindergarten wing had play equipment including the tallest swing set with at least four swings with long metal chain "ropes".

One could go so high, some tried to loop over. The large music room building was between the play equipment area and the boys' bathroom.

There were three huge banyan trees, two on both ends of the front yard, and one along the circular driveway leading to the cafeteria back entrance for deliveries and to the teachers' garage. On occasion, we watched the teachers arriving.

We were awed at Mrs. Shinoda rounding the top curve at full throttle, and hoped that her black Model-T wouldn't tip over.

Across the back boundary, and across a narrow road, was a building with shop, art, and biology classes. For some reason, I remember Mr. Leo Yap teaching us how to propagate orchids in flasks there.

The intermediate campus across the street, had a two story band room, and an inverted L-shaped building housing an audio visual/meeting room at the top end, and a home economics room at the bottom end. In between were classrooms of various subjects for grades 7 through 9. Students from Keaukaha School joined us from 7th grade. We were known as the WISBA Rainbows.

Some of us attended after school Japanese Language School in the basement of the Higashi Hongwanji temple, across Kainehe Street from the back side of the intermediate campus. Before the start of language school, we often went to play at Liliuokalani Park, or if we had extra money, we would go through Kapena Lane to indulge in the fluffy shave ice at Ueda Store on Lihiwai Street, across from Suisan. The pleasure was worth the punishment we sometimes got for being late to Japanese School.

All of that has vanished. Replacing them and more is the green of a golf course on a current map of the area online.

Also gone, are some of the significant places within Waiakea Town where we grew up, and includes Skipper's Cove, Waiakea Fire Station, Nagahisa Store, Matsumura Restaurant, Ogata Service Station, Taniguchi Store, Cafe 100, the Community Bathhouse, and Waiakea Theater, where I saw the first 3D movie, Fort Ticonderoga, for which we were issued cardboard rimmed glasses with red and green plastic lenses, so that we screamed seeing tomahawks thrown straight at us.

Having survived the 1946 Tidal Wave, the towns of Waiakea as well as Shinmachi had little defense against the one on May 23, 1960.



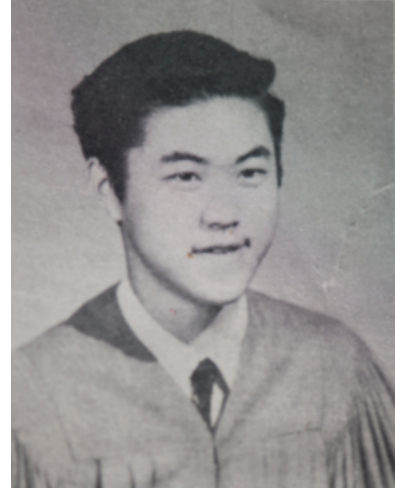
HILO ICE AND COLD STORAGE (ERNEST MIKI)



WAIAKEA (WAILOA) BRIDGE (ERNEST MIKI)

STEVENS OKURA

LAKE FOREST, CA



On May 23, 1960, a Monday, I recall the tsunami warning siren going off in the evening. I thought that meant the tsunami was about to hit real soon. I did not know it was a 6 hour warning. At the time we lived on Wailuku Dr., near the Reed's Island bridge. Wailuku Dr. is the street that runs behind the Hilo Public Library on Waianuenue Ave. Our house was about a half mile from the ocean. When nothing happened by around 10 pm I went to bed thinking there was not going to be any "tidal wave." The next morning I found out a tsunami had hit Hilo late at night.

I must have found out there was no school that day so I walked down our street to where it meets Kamehameha Ave, the bay front street in Hilo.

When I rounded the corner onto Kam Ave. I couldn't believe what I saw. The entire Kam Ave. was completely covered with debris and sediment. I could not see any pavement from the Kam Ave. — Waianuenue intersection looking toward Waiakea Town, as far as I could see, just completely covered in wreckage. I remember a huge 5-6' boulder lying in the middle of Kam across from what is now the Tsunami Museum, which used to be a bank in those days. The street was not passable, too much debris. I regret not going mauka to Kinoole St. then walking to Haili and especially Mamo Street where destruction was extensive. But at the time I had no idea what had been destroyed. I subsequently went home. I don't recall much traffic or people. Things were pretty quiet since the wave had hit several hours earlier and people were probably still in shock as to what to do next or were not aware of the extent of the destruction.

Later the next day or two I recall two huge bonfires were burning in the direction of the Hilo trash dump out past the old Hilo Airport. Those fires burned day and night for days as the wreckage that was Hilo was just burned.

At some point later, maybe 2-3 weeks or so, I drove down a cleared Kam Ave and saw what was left of Mamo St. Half the buildings on Mamo St. makai of Kinoole St. were gone or badly damaged and everything along the bay front was also totally destroyed, just rubble or just gone. I remember that there was a supermarket diagonally across from the Hilo Theater on

Kam. The parking lot of the store was completely stripped of its asphalt paving. The wave had peeled it all off like an orange and a couple of big asphalt slabs were still lying nearby. Parking meters in the area on Kam Ave. were bent to the ground. Everything on the mauka side of Kam Ave past Ponahawai St. was rubble.

As I continued down Kam I passed what was the Hilo Iron Works not too far from the Wailoa River bridge. The Iron Works was just a bunch of twisted I-beams that were at least a foot across. The place was a wreck. Across the street, there were still some coconut trees standing. I recall the bark on a tree being scraped about 30' up, amazing. I read now that the wave that hit Hilo was 35' high, easy to see why Waiakea town was gone; everything was just rubble. My buddies and I used to occasionally go to a small cafe in Waiakea. I think it was called Skipper's Cove. There was one, maybe a bar, called Snug Harbor, and the Waiakea Theater, all gone.

I recall people talked about the large tractor or bulldozer that disappeared from the Caterpillar display window, the building next to Hilo Iron Works.

Something I read said it was a 10 ton tractor that ended up in Hilo Bay.

The biggest loss to me was the grand Hilo Theater on Kam Ave., an elegant theater in the old style, with the red velvet curtains, red velvet seats, nice lights along the walls and the large organ out front that a woman in a white gown would play before the movies started. The building still stood but the inside was no doubt destroyed. Memories.

The only other things I remember were our graduation ceremonies in the old school gym, because the Civic Auditorium had been damaged by the tsunami and our senior luncheon at the Naniloa was cancelled and the money donated to the disaster fund. As they say these days, bummer. I think classes at Hilo High were cancelled for at least a week because the school was being used to house people who lost their homes. I had heard that 2 or 3 Hilo High students were among those killed but I don't know if that was true. One of the guys I used to know told me he escaped in just his underwear after the tsunami destroyed their house on Piopio Street near where the government buildings are today. The street is still there but is in a park area.

The 1960 tsunami was caused by a 9.5 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Chile and the wave took 15 hours to reach Hilo. It is the most powerful earthquake ever recorded. For us, a harsh introduction to adulthood. Watch YouTube videos of the destruction.

Pau.

1952 Tsunami — Recollection

When I was 10 in 1952 a tsunami hit Hilo but caused little damage. Looking things up it was in the afternoon of Nov. 4. When my friend and I heard the warning sirens we ran to the middle bridge over the Wailuku River. In those days we lived on Wailuku Drive which runs along the river, on the Kau side. We figured that it was too dangerous to go to the first bridge at the mouth of the river and the middle bridge was two large arches with no supports in the river. So we stood in the middle of the bridge looking over the concrete railing. Actually we should not have been there but we didn't know any better and there were no adults around.

After awhile the water in the river's estuary, just below us, completely emptied out with just a stream from the river. We could see a white wave crest out pass the breakwater, maybe 3 miles out. Soon we saw a large wave come into the bay, after going completely over the breakwater and it swept across Hilo Bay. The wave got concentrated and came full force up the mouth of the river covering the first bridge and came up the estuary straight at us as a vertical wall of brown water I estimate at about 50' high because the estuary is maybe 20' deep and we were about 40' above normal estuary level and the wave roared under us within 10'-15', totally awesome. We were too awed to be afraid.

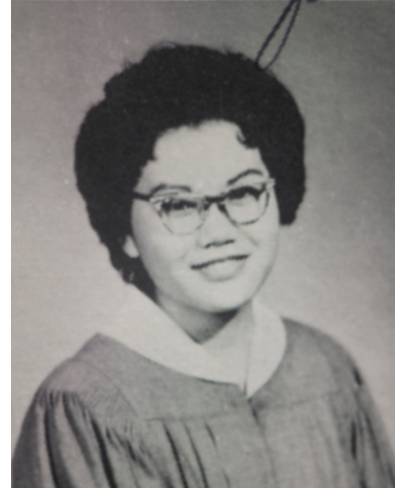
This event I will never forget, as it is one of the two most incredible things I've seen in my life. We ran across the street and watched the water completely cover Maui's Canoe, a large flat area of lava rock that is a scenic spot. The wave continued up to the 3rd bridge and went under it and hit a 10' -15' ledge in the middle of the river went over that for several yards then died out. The water under us was in total turmoil, then it all started to flow back to sea. I don't remember much after that other than the images I saw are still vividly with me after over 70 years.

Fortunately, I lived to see all that and later learned that no one was killed and not much damage occurred. I've since read that the wave was recorded as 12' high, however because of the topography of the coastline and the river's mouth tsunamis are known to get amplified under certain conditions. That incident and the 1960 tsunami later made me become an oceanographer as I developed an interest in the ocean and studied that field. After a few years I switched to IT but these days I wish I was back in oceanography with all the interesting high tech doings going on in that field.

Who ever buys me a beer gets to hear the other most incredible thing I saw in my life, just as awesome, lol. Pau.

JEAN ARAKI POTTER

COLUMBUS, NE



May 23, 1960. It started out just like every other Hilo High School day.

There were warnings of a tsunami (tidal wave) headed toward Hawaii. Typically, the warnings came from Alaska or the Aleutian Islands earthquakes but we usually ignored them because they ended up just being weak waves coming into the Wailoa River. The only issue it ever caused was fish being thrown onto land. Free fish for everyone! We only lived about half a mile from the Wailoa River so my siblings would walk there often to swim. (I only went whenever I felt brave enough to walk through the cow pasture. Haha!) But this time, the tidal wave originated from an earthquake in Chile, South America.

When I heard the warning that Monday, I wasn't worried; it was bedtime for me, so off to sleep I went. During the night my mom rushed in and said, "Get up! We'd better get out of here! I think the wave is coming in towards us!" I got up, got dressed and we went to my sister Maizie's house farther inland. Her small house was crowded with family and friends that night. I kept calling our house phone and getting busy signals. I just wanted to know if the house was still there & thinking if it rang, our home was still there. We couldn't see anything that was happening outside as the powerplant by the ocean got taken out by the wave. No power meant it was dark, which made it scarier.

The next morning, we drove home, and the house was gone from where it sat. The wave had picked up our house and placed it right in the middle of banana bushes which were originally 50 yards or so from the house. Everything in the main part of the house was still dry, so we were able to salvage some clothes and other items. Other parts of the house were destroyed by the wave and unrecoverable.

The civic center where we used to watch basketball games was now a shelter full of the newly homeless. Since it was packed there, we had to stay in Maizie's little house (my parents, myself, and my sister Janet bunked there). Thankfully, while we stayed there, the rest of my family was able to salvage more belongings from our house.

School continued as far as I know. A couple of my schoolmates died in the tidal wave. I do remember hearing that one of them died in his bed as the water came in. Graduation day was in early June. Normally, we would've had the ceremony at the civic center, but it was still full of people, so a brief graduation ceremony was held in the school gym. Before the wave we had planned to celebrate our graduation by having a meal at a restaurant across Lili'uokalani Park right by the shore. The restaurant was gone, no more celebration...but who would have wanted to celebrate anyway?

Life was pretty different after that. I had already planned on moving to California right after graduation, so I missed seeing the destruction cleanup. I lived on Ohia Lane on Piopio Street, which, as far as I know, was pretty much destroyed. Years later I visited the old area and saw that most of the buildings and houses I remember from childhood were gone. Those were and are sad remembrances!!!



DAMAGED COCONUT ISLAND BRIDGE (ERNEST MIKI)

IRMA (GUILLERMA) GALDONES SUMERA

HILO, HI

I was an usherette at Hilo Palace Theater. When the first siren sounded the eve of the tidal wave about 4 people stood up and left the theater. The second siren sounded, half of the theater stood up and left. However when the third siren was heard, the theater emptied and we the employees were able to lock up and go home safely.



TROPICS RESTAURANT (ERNEST MIKI)

MELVIN TAWARA

HONOLULU, HI

CHRISTINA LANE

I lived with my parents at 46 Christina Lane at the time the tsunami destroyed Hilo town. The lane was lined by residences on both sides of the narrow gravel and asphalt road. There were about 30 to 40 homes in the area. The homes were older, simple but well constructed structures. Some were duplexes. Most were built on stilts to allow for room on the ground level for storage, parking, laundry facilities and additional rooms.



The area was bordered by Pauahi Street, which is still in use today. Kumu Street served as the opposite side border. Kumu Street was eliminated after the tsunami. Kilauea Avenue comprised the upper portion of the community. Patricia T., Jerome F. and I lived in the Christina Lane community. We are 1960 Hilo High classmates.

The Villa Franca complex of simple, low cost homes lined Kumu Street. About 15 to 20 homes comprised that project. The 1960 tsunami destroyed or damaged most of the buildings in the Christina Lane and Villa Franca neighborhoods. All remaining structures in that area were removed following the tsunami.

The concrete bridge which straddles the drainage canal on Pauahi Street still exists and is a grim reminder of the disaster. The large banyan tree which grew next to the bridge could be the same one I remember being there. The land area is now almost exclusively used as soccer fields. The entire area also serves as a drainage area when heavy rains overflow the canal which is located on the upper portion of the fields. The canal leads to and empties into the Wailoa River. It also unofficially continues to serve as a demarcation line for our Christina Lane community.

The Hilo Boys Club was located at the corner of Kamehameha Ave and Pauahi St. and was about 50 yards below the canal. It was destroyed by the tsunami. The Hilo Theater was located across the Boys Club on Kamehameha Ave. It no longer exists. Hilo Bay is about a half mile from Kamehameha Ave.

Entrance to the community was mostly through an extension of Hualalai Street which intersects Kilauea Ave. This street ran between the old Ford dealership, Ruddle Sales and Service and the Kadota Brothers Grocery

Store. Hualalai continued down to join Christina Lane. Christina Lane continued down to the canal, ran parallel to it for about 40 yards and ran parallel to Pauahi until it exited onto Pauahi. The Down Town Longs Drugs store now occupies the spot where the Kadota Brothers store was located. The City and County headquarters and offices now occupy the opposite side of Pauahi Street.

MAY 23, 1960

Lulled into complacency by a series of false tsunami alarms, my family, despite knowing of the tsunami warning, chose to ignore it. Over the years my family learned that evacuation required a lot of effort. We had to pack our valuables and leave the community, often at inopportune times. The numerous false alerts frustrated us. We chose to stay at home. That ultimately was a major and costly mistake.

At about one o'clock in the morning on May 23, 1960, my family and I were asleep. We were awakened by what I thought was a large diesel truck which sometimes traveled down the lane as a short cut to a parking area on Pauahi Street. There was a loud rumble and strong vibration which seemed louder than usual. My father opened the front door to check on the sounds. I heard him tell my mother that it was the tidal wave coming. He apparently could see portions of the wave destroying buildings in the distance.

The house then started moving and it was then obvious that the tsunami had hit. I could hear screaming from the neighborhood. Termite droppings which collected in the ceiling rained down on me when the roof shifted. The roof then collapsed. I was pinned to my bed with parts of the ceiling and roof lying on me.

It was at that very moment that I thought my death was imminent. My bed was going to be my death bed. I felt water wash over me. The house was still in motion and the ceiling material shifted and I managed to get out from under the felled roof. I was now in the water but no longer pinned to the bed. I was no longer under the roof.

There was debris all about me. Iron roof material, lumber and water surrounded me. I could see "lightning" like flashes which provided some illumination. I learned later that the flashes were from the Waiakea Hilo Electric (HELCO) power station. The station was short circuiting due to the water. The flashes were a blessing since I could sporadically see in the dark during the lightning.

My moments of panic after being pinned by the roof slowly dissipated as I realized that it was now up to me to figure out how I could save myself

and get out of this predicament. The rescue squad or life guards were not coming for me. I did not know how long I was in the rubble and water. It felt like an eternity but I suspect it lasted only a few minutes. Strangely, I had not even considered that my parents were hurt or injured or gone. I assumed that if I made it to this point, they too would be alive and safe.

The short circuiting helped me make out tall trees still standing and I thought I should seek shelter on the trees by climbing it. I continued to look around and I could now see flashlights from the area which were not flattened by the wave. It looked to me like the lights were coming from the higher regions of Christina Lane which the wave never reached. I decided to head in that direction since it looked safer than the trees.

It was during this period that I came upon two preteen children, a girl and a boy. They came out from under a fallen roof. They appeared scared but not overly fear stricken. The girl was mostly concerned because she was naked and ashamed of that. I assumed that they were residents of the Villa Franca complex as they were not anyone who looked familiar.

I told them to stay calm and try to head for the high ground and to be careful not to get hurt by being reckless in their escape. We were all barefoot and with the amount of debris around us, we had to crawl and climb over many sharp objects. I told them to stay together and follow me if they chose to. They were the only people I saw in the water and rubble at the time.

I decided to shout out my last name numerous times to attract attention. Eventually, I received a response and I knew they were likely my parents. I continued to shout to maintain contact and to be guided by the bystanders' flashlights and also by the lightning flashes. I then knew in which direction to go.

Eventually I found my way to the upper part of Christina Lane to find my parents who were both okay. They were battered and distressed. My father's feet were cut badly but the injuries occurred when he rushed to meet me while I was in the debris. I later learned that their section of the house had been pushed to the high water mark and although collapsed, they were not even wet.

The recession of the water was slow and easy and probably influenced by the amount of debris in the water. My thoughts were to try to get out of the area as soon as possible. My concern was that if another wave followed, we would be in deep trouble as there was nothing to impede and slow the wave. Fortunately, I learned later that we had just experienced the last of five waves. The fifth wave was likely the largest and the one which caused the most damage to Hilo town.

Once we found each other, I convinced my parents to get out of the area as soon as possible since I continued to worry about another wave. We decided to walk to a nearby relative's home and even caught a ride to get to there. We spent an uncomfortable evening at our relative's home on Kinoole Street. It was only a mile or two away and out of the tsunami zone. We were safe there. I believe the two children eventually found their families as I lost sight of them during the moment of excitement when I found my parents.

DAYBREAK

At day break, I borrowed a truck from my relatives and returned to the Christina Lane area. I tried to prepare myself for the worst scenario while driving there. I knew it would be bad but I was not fully prepared for what I saw in the light of the early morning, I could not believe what I saw. It was unbelievable.

The words that came out of my mouth at that moment is not printable. Expletives deleted. My knees buckled when I saw the devastation. The damage was horrific. The homes in the community were flattened or severely damaged if they were still standing. The community was non-existent and unrecognizable. The area was like a massive rubbish dump. What I witnessed a few hours previously during the lightning flashes was only a tiny portion of the destruction I saw in the daylight.

I looked for anyone familiar as there were a few people at the location. I did not recognize anyone. It was then that I began to recognize how fortunate my family and I were to have escaped this disaster without significant injuries. We lost the home, car, clothing, papers, and most possessions. But we escaped with our lives and were safe.

I observed some interesting things. The home directly across the lane, classmate Patricia T's home, was now about 100 yards away but pretty much intact. It had been pushed by the water to the Kumu Street area. My home was flattened and remnants of it was located at the high water mark. It was unrecognizable. My parents were in that part of the house which was pushed to the upper portion of Christina Lane. They did not even get wet. My bedroom had broken off from the rest of the house. I could not find my room. The fear, anxiety, and anger which I felt a few hours previously, began to re-emerge after seeing the destruction. It was traumatic.

Immediately after, I drove to pick up some friends to help recover whatever I could from the area. We found little worth saving. My parents later came by and did manage to find some clothing and personal items. There was nothing but rubble.

During the course of search for things to salvage, we learned from our contact with other residents of Christina Lane that there were some casualties in the neighborhood. My immediate neighbor lost a family member. Apparently that person died as a result of the home collapsing on him. A family who lived about 30 yards away also lost a child under similar circumstances. I learned later that 61 people died as a direct result of the wave, with three coming from the Christina lane community.

RECOVERY AND REBUILDING

My family was taken in by my father's sibling in the days following the disaster. She and her husband found us through the community grapevine and invited us to join them. They had a large home which could accommodate us fairly comfortably. We lived with that family for a year and then relocated to a friend's home as we awaited the construction of our replacement home. It was gratifying to receive the assistance we needed desperately.

We received a lot of support from our extended family. One gave us a used vehicle and the ordinary things needed for comfortable living. It helped a lot. The government also provided considerable assistance. The Red Cross and other support agencies provided help and services. We availed ourselves of the help as we had nothing following the wave.

It is now sixty three years since the tsunami. My memory of the reconstruction of the Hilo community has faded through the years. Our preoccupation with restoring our lives dimmed my remembrance of the process through which the town recovered. It was slow and tedious at times but progress was made daily.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In retrospect, I now believe the tsunami survivor community's resurrection was significantly affected when the State of Hawaii offered state land to the victims. As the survivors of the wave lost their homes and were in need of places to live, raw land was made available for purchase. The land was offered to the victims at reasonable cost. Financial institutions also cooperated and provided loans for the purpose of purchasing the land and building homes.

The only conditions were that the prospective purchasers be wave victims or those who were displaced by the tsunami. Buyers were also required to agree to not re-sell the land unless stringent conditions were met. The wave victims who chose to purchase were allowed to

select their 1/3 acre lots in the order determined by a lottery system conducted by the state.

The lots being sold bordered both sides of what is now known as Iwalani Street. This street is almost one mile long in length. It extends from Puainako Street to Kawaiiani Street. More importantly, the land is far from the ocean. This street became informally referred to as the Tidal Wave Street as it was reserved for the wave victims.

My parents entered their names into the lottery and chose a parcel when their turn came to select the site of their future home. I remember my family being joyful, as well as concerned, due to the precarious financial position we were in after having lost everything but our lives. We struggled to come up with the funds and we had to scrimp to afford the parcel. This new neighborhood slowly developed a tight bond as we were gratified to have this opportunity which was unprecedented. We were elated at being provided with the opportunity to own property and build homes.

The actions of former Christina Lane resident, Everett S., known to most as Bully, further influenced the development of the sense of unity. Bully was our neighbor on Christina Lane. He too purchased a lot. Bully was also an employee of the construction company which was contracted to build the road and clear the land being made available for sale. He was a heavy equipment operator and with the approval of his employers, Bully volunteered his services to assist the purchasers to sculpt their land with his bulldozer and heavy equipment. He tried to accommodate the new owners' wishes and their vision for their piece of land. He did this outside of his regular work hours and on weekends. He did it at no cost to the new owners.

Needless to say, he was a very popular person on Iwalani Street. He saved the new owners and neighbors time, energy and money. His actions provided much more than comfort and unity to everyone. Bully's quiet but friendly and gracious nature fostered bonds between the residents. It strengthened the relationships. Through the actions of the State and with Bully's help, the residents of Iwalani Street became a community.

ADDENDUM:

It is interesting in that Pat T. lived across Christina Lane from me. After being affected by the tsunami, Pat's family stayed in Wainaku with her grandparents. Coincidentally, my family was taken in by relatives who lived next door to where the Ts were temporarily living.

Then, when the Ts participated in the lottery for a parcel on Iwalani Street, they selected a lot immediately next to my parent's choice for a home I think it was a deliberate choice for them to do so. The T. family and my family have been neighbors for decades.



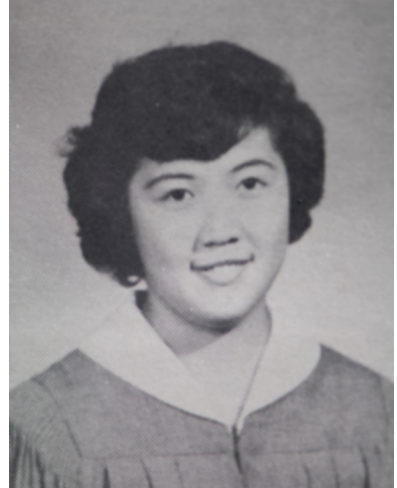
HOUSING BEHIND MODERN CAMERA (ERNEST MIKI)



HILO ELECTRIC / COW PALACE (ERNEST MIKI)

GLADYS TANIMOTO TOKUOKA

PEARL CITY, HI



A tsunami is coming at 1 a.m.

It was unwelcome news but maybe it won't happen because there were many false alarms this year.

So we went about our business. But we quietly packed a few things and threw them in the trunk of the car. You know, just in case we needed a change of clothing.

The hours went by slowly as we watched the news on the television. We lived across Suisan Fish Market, so my brother kept a watchful eye on the water. As the day turned to night, and the water seemed to be going up and down, we decided to evacuate.

The family jumped into the car and we slowly went up the street. As we approached Higashi Hongwanji, we saw a few people gathering there. So we joined them.

Maybe we need to go to higher grounds. As we moved, we saw a man running up the lane that connected the street we were on to the river's entrance. "It's going to be a big one," he yelled.

So we drove quickly up to where Sure Save Supermarket was, and suddenly a flash of light like a lightning bolt lit up the sky. The wave had hit the electric light company building across the fish market. The electric company had pulled the switch to turn off the power as the wave hit the building.

We sped up the street to higher grounds and finally stopped on Kinoole Street in downtown Hilo. It was dark and we couldn't see anything. We just sat in the car and waited.

After a couple of hours, things seemed quiet so we decided to go home. As we approached Waiakea Houselots, we were told we couldn't go any further to Waiakea Town because of the damage.

We ended up at our cousin's home in Waiakea Houselots. They were kind and let us stay with them for a few weeks. Our rented house was completely demolished. Everywhere around the block, household goods and clothing were covered with stinky mud and black oil. The bridge over the river held smashed boats. After a few days, the air around Waiakea was horrible.

My mother's brother had a huge vacant lot near UHHC. He was able to get a few old houses moved to the lot and had the houses renovated for a couple of families to live there. We were very fortunate.

People were very kind and generous. The Red Cross helped to get some household items. A UH professor offered to buy shoes for the girl graduates of Hilo High School to wear for the graduation ceremony.

However, we did not have a ceremony. It was a small gathering at the school gymnasium...that's all that I can remember.



COCONUT ISLAND (ERNEST MIKI)



BOAT NEAR LILUOKALANI PARK (ERNEST MIKI)

BETTY ARAKAWA TOMINAGA

PEARL CITY, HI

*This recollection is from Donald Tominaga,
Class of 1957 Hilo High School, who lived on
Pele Lane.*



There was a warning about a tsunami approaching the Big Island, but later in the evening, it was canceled, so people returned home.

It was about 11:00 P.M., so I went to sleep. I was awakened by a loud crashing sound and booming sound, and people yelling for help. I remember gathering blankets and looking to help people.

In the morning, I saw the devastation and many homes were destroyed. There was no electricity. The disaster area was from Kilauea Avenue, down Kumu Street, until the Bayfront area. My friend's mother and sister were found alive, but George was not at home at the time the tsunami hit. George was safe, as he was visiting a friend.

My boss, Mr. Nagao, was warned to remove his truck and prepare for the tsunami, but he didn't think it was coming. His business was located by Hilo Iron Works, near the Bayfront area, and he lost everything.

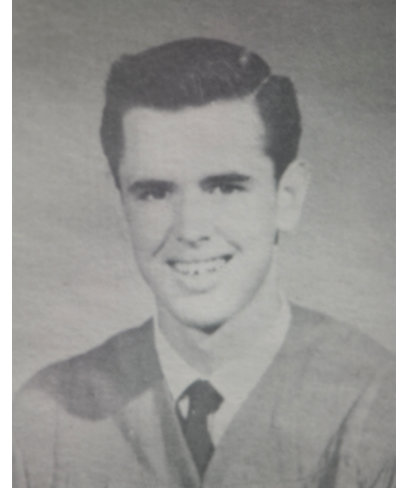
Hilo Theater was also destroyed. I can't remember his name, but I lost a friend during the tsunami. This is about all I can recall.



WAIAKEA TOWN (ERNEST MIKI)

JOHN WALKER

BEND, OR



On the morning of the 23rd of May, 1960, my Dad and I were out in our backyard in Honolii Pali #1. The time was close to 1:00 A.M. on a partially moonlit night. Our home faced the ocean on the cliffs of Honolii so we had a partial view of the Honolii River outlet to the ocean. Sirens blaring — the time had come for the tsunami to arrive. And arrive it did! Near enough to the predicted time. First wave — the sea at the river estuary receded to the point that we could see the shining rocks at the outlet to the sea. I believe that there were three waves? I think it was the second wave that did the most devastating damage from Mamo Street on down through Waiakea Town, etc.

When the series of waves hit the cliffs of Honolii, it was like a thunderous roar, vibrating the ground we stood on. They then reverberated off the cliffs and gained momentum (speed and height) heading down Hilo Bay's narrowed (V-U shaped) sea bottom structure. At this point — that's when the speed and height of the wave really accumulated and rushed on with its destructive power towards Bay Front and Waiakea Town.

You remember the fishing sampans from Suisan's Wailoa River? Well, they were fortunately all out to sea prior to the wave. Bob Fujii's (Hilo Finance Co.) wife was on one of the sampans and she told me that she could feel the swell of the ocean passing under the boat. You could see all the lights of the sampans congregated together for their safety — it was really a beautiful sight to see on this disastrous night.

At sunrise, the mauka Paukaa Portuguese kids (Reis, Pachecos, Malagdays), and me (haole boy), all headed down to the Honolii River estuary to check it out. Lo and behold, it was a fisherman's paradise. Laying on the banks of the river, in the California / Wainaku / Honohono and Pilau grasses, were all varieties of fish — large and small. We picked them up and carried (the ones not spoiled) what we could and took the fish to our homes and the Filipino Paukaa plantation camp for future barbeque. Ono times!!

I owned a blue Vespa scooter (along with Bernard Lau "the Blue Angels"). Anyway, from this point, I left home to see what had become of our beautiful/quaint town of Hilo and be of whatever assistance I could

be. I had to go through Puueo because the Wailuku Bridge no stay (now rebuilt called the “singing bridge” because of all the pukas — for let the tsunami watta inside.

Anyway, past the Puueo Poi Factory and on over the Puueo Bridge and left turn on Shipman past Hilo Armory, Miko (hotdogs, etc.) on to Kam Ave., to Koehnen’s, Hilo Drug (Haole hangout), Men’s Shop, Kress Store, D. Y. Lau, Moses Co., Standard Drug (St. Joe hangout), Shiigi Drug, etc.... Whaata mess from Mamo St. on. No more Mamo Fish Market, Mamo Theater, Pick and Pay, etc. only theater left in Hilo was the Palace Theater on Haili St. My hangout, the Paramount Grill (kanaka hangout) was still there.

Meanwhile, I was on my scooter dodging all da kine stuffs on the road. What a catastrophe!! I don’t remember how, but I was able to continue on down where there was total destruction and had to place in my mind where everything wen stay and navigate through it all from up at Tsuda’s Service Station, Kadota Bros. etc., and down to where was — Sun Sun Lau, Manong Motors, Mrs. Moto’s Inn, Boys’ Club, Hilo Theater, Bell’s Fountain, I. Kitagawa, Goya Brothers/May’s Fountain (Wrecker hangout?), Okazu/sushi place, Mitchell Laundry (in the back) and down to Hilo Iron Works and the Wailoa Bridge.

Parking meters were all laid flat to the ground. The National Guard hadn’t arrived yet to stop me at the eventual check point, so was able to get through. Then turned left on Lihiwai, past the power plant and ice plant on to Banyan Drive — could go only so far. Back to (no longer) Waiakea Town and talked to some of the dazed residents that were sitting on the side of what used to be — unbelievable — they thought it was just a horrible dream/nightmare — time to wake up? Where was the town of Waiakea?

Cafe 100 (2nd move) and Skippers Cove (ono kaukau), Waiakea Theater, Japanese/Filipino stores, fire station — where you wen go?... Waiakea-Kai no stay. Only the clock remained — that was frozen in time when the tsunami wen hit/strike (pauhana time). My kindergarten preschool (with Leilani Luis, etc.) by Waiakea-Kai gym behind the clock — where you wen go?

All I could see in my travels was mud, evidence of human casualties/death, boats, safes, broken homes/buildings, etc. etc. Then the National Guard on their arrival, asked me where I had gone and if I saw anything that needed their immediate emergency attention/evacuation — and of course the locations I had been to — but my reply was that there was only total destruction and death everywhere. I asked if I could be of any help

and was told all the assistance they needed was either here already or on the way and asked me to leave the area.

My father, Edward Walker of the First Trust Co., was one of the emergency response/evacuation/insurance adjustment teams that had arrived on scene while I was departing. Needless to say, he was very angry with me for being there.... Oooooops! Lost my scooter for two weeks, whateva!

Shortly after arriving on scene, my dad was required to wear the protective/hazard suits because of the dangerous conditions created by decomposing bodies in the heat of the day. He spent many days with the teams digging out and searching for bodies and evaluation of the devastated areas.



LILIUOKALANI PARK (ERNEST MIKI)

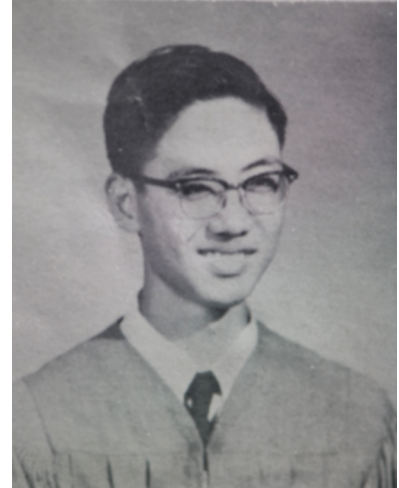


LILIUOKALANI PARK (ERNEST MIKI)

RODNEY YAMAOKA

SAN DIEGO, CA

Do you remember Tomei Akegarasu? He was my good friend and classmate. His family used to occupy the Hongwanji Temple near the Suisan docks. He told me this story. If he is still around, you can get corroboration. *(Editor's note: Tomei passed away March 28, 2023.)*



Anyway...he said he got up the night of the tsunami when the first wave awoke him as it floated his bed. He jumped out of bed, woke his mother, sister, and brother-in-law and lickety split ran out of the temple to safety.

Luckily, the temple was a concrete building and withstood the onslaught. (Note: Roger Kawasaki, whose dad taught judo downstairs of the temple verbally mentioned that his only recollection was that he heard that the temple was shifted onto the fronting Kainehe Street by the waves.)

Another classmate gave me this advice: If you go down to the beach to see the tsunami, park your car facing away from the water, then when the wave comes, you can get away much faster.

My brother and I did go downtown a couple of days after the event to help with the cleanup.



ROAD AT LILIUOKALANI PARK (ERNEST MIKI)

SHELDON ZANE

HONOLULU, HI



The term “tidal wave” although a misnomer, was used to describe the phenomena of the creation of unique, humungous waves until approximately 1963 when the term “tsunami” became the official word replacing tidal wave.

In the Spring of 1960, our Hilo High School Class was in the final semester of school, our Senior Prom was already held, a Senior Awards Assembly was held, class rings were distributed, and we looked forward to the activities and celebrations leading up to our graduation in June.

Growing up in Hilo, most of us were aware of the many instances of tidal wave alerts and the devastating tidal wave on April 1st of 1946 that occurred in Hilo Bay. Later, while a graduate student studying Civil Engineering, I learned that Hilo Bay and Crescent Bay in Northern California had unique underwater formations that refract, funneled and accelerated the formation of large waves as the result of earthquakes thousands of miles away. During the 1950’s we experienced numerous tidal wave alerts, most that did not do any damage or were of small heights. Since my father was the Hilo Port Superintendent, he was one of the first to be notified of a tidal wave alert. During these alerts, I often accompanied him to the pier to move the wharf’s rolling stock of vehicles and tractors to higher ground. I believe that this was the situation on the evening of May 22, 1960. Normally, after moving the equipment, usually at night, we went home for the night and relocated the equipment back to the piers the next day.

However, on May 23rd this was not the case. At about 1:07 am on the 23rd, a huge tidal wave engulfed Hilo Bay and it became a night of infamy that imprinted the event forever in our minds and drastically affected our plans and celebrations for graduation.

A little after 1:00 am on May 23rd, we were awakened by Classmate Albert Higuchi, who lived several houses away. Albert had a sister who lived near the shoreline in Waiakea and he woke us to give us the news that a tidal wave had struck and his sister’s family was missing as the tidal wave had struck the town of Waiakea. Realizing the severity of the tidal wave we somehow learned that the Police Department needed volunteers to assist in this disaster. My Dad and I proceeded to the Police Station

where approximately 30 men had gathered to volunteer. As a ham radio operator, I was identified as one that could assist in radio communication. However, it was decided that because of the darkness, it was best if we waited until daylight to start work. The next morning, I returned as a volunteer. I don't recall who I was with as my Dad was now involved in his work at the wharf. I was assigned as part of a search and rescue effort in the Reed's Bay Peninsula starting at Banyan Drive at "Ice Pond" and ending at the Wailuku Bridge. Immediately starting off, we came across a section of tatung iron roofing in the middle of the road. It was being used to cover a body I recognized as a teacher friend of my mother. Proceeding along Banyan Drive, we approached a cluster of homes that had been inundated by the tidal wave. I still distinctly remember a fireman carrying the naked body of a young boy and crying uncontrollably. Those were the only two deaths I personally experienced that day.

Later that day, our gang gathered with classmate Jerome Fukuda at his relative's home on Mohouli Street well above the tidal wave inundation zone. Fortunately, once the warning sirens sounded, Jerome and his mother had moved to where they were now as their home was washed several hundred feet away and they had lost all of their personal belongings in their home.

In the following days, we were still in a daze with what we had experienced.

We then learned that instead of a formal graduation at the Civic Center, our graduation would be held in our school gymnasium. Our guest graduation speaker was to be Wayne Collins, a popular TV newscaster from Honolulu. I remember after graduation we did have small parties with the opportunity to sign each other's yearbooks.

Right after graduation, I attended an annual church camp at Olowalu College on Maui where I was surrounded by teenagers from other Islands that wanted to know how we survived the tidal wave and were amazed with what we had experienced. Upon returning to Hilo, I left Hawaii soon after to report to the U.S. Naval Academy, my home for the next four years. I have always missed the opportunity to enjoy a last summer at home with classmates before leaving for school at the end of the summer like most of the others. However, I was kept informed of the summer by many classmates who that summer wrote to me and continued to write to me for the next four years including Albert Higuchi, Jerome Fukuda, Clifford Dodo, Eddie Fujimoto, Jimmy "Kimo" Andrews, Marilyn Fujii and others I apologize for having forgotten. Another classmate who left Hilo early in the summer was Theodore Togashi to attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. We continue to communicate and visit with each other to this very day.

The tidal wave of 1960 has had profound impact on my life. It was a bittersweet time, yet it forged a very close friendship among our Hilo High School Class of 1960 classmates and I will always cherish our friendships and dearly miss those who have already left us. I look forward to the continued friendship of those who are still with us and vow to try to attend as many of our class reunions in the future as I can.

My aloha and blessings.



HILO IRON WORKS (ERNEST MIKI)



LILIUOKALANI PARK (ERNEST MIKI)

IT'S A SMALL ISLAND

IT'S A SMALL ISLAND

Little Stories About the Big Isle

By A.E.P. WALL

Editor of the Tribune-Herald

IF YOU'RE SLEEPING in your own bed tonight you're luckier than a good many Hilo residents.

The need for temporary housing for seismic wave victims is desperate.

Possibly you have a spare room, an empty basement apartment or a vacant cottage that you'd like to offer at a reasonable rental to a single person or a family in need of a temporary home.

If you do, the Tribune-Herald will publish your classified advertisement for such rental units without any charge to you or to the homeless victims of the wave.

This offer is limited to temporary, emergency rental housing.

Bring your ad to the Tribune-Herald office today. It is another service of the Big Island's home newspaper.



WHEN I WANTED TO MOVE to the Big Island some of my friends in Honolulu asked why.

I gave them several reasons, but foremost among them was my thought that there's no finer place for children to grow up.

My feeling about Big Island youngsters was confirmed yesterday, and hundreds of Hilo High School students were in on it.

The Senior Class had set aside \$300 for a luau, which was called off after the wave hit. It had another \$150 to print an issue of the school paper, but all of the copy was lost when the Hawaii News Printshop was washed out. Many students had bought luau tickets at \$1.75 each, but turned their refunds over to the Tribune-Herald Disaster Fund.

The result of all this was a whopping \$900 donation from Hilo High.

It provides a standing answer to those who think the average teen-ager lacks the ability to come through with a mature response to a community problem.

Everybody's proud of those Hilo High youngsters.



THIS COLUMN FOR MAY 23, the day the wave struck, has been reprinted in full in the Congressional Record. It was introduced into the Record by Sen. Oren E. Long.

Hilo High School Senior Class 900.00

BLANK PAGES FOR NOTES OR FURTHER THOUGHTS

