

Interview with David Kurohara

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Conducted by Torri Law

Wailoa State Park, Hilo HI

Transcribed by Torri Law, reviewed by Brenda Asuncion and David Kurohara

*Note: Bracketed text in the conversation indicates clarifying points that the speaker added post-interview.*

*David and I sit at a pavilion on the East side of the pond, facing the water. See "Interview Site" on map.*

Torri Law: Is there a specific *Loko I'a* or a specific fish pond or specific body of water, maybe Wailoa river, that is particularly special to you or that you would call 'yours?'

David Kurohara: Well for the majority of my life, fishing for mullet, Wailoa State Park is probably the most special place to fish for mullet because it is the only designated mullet fishing area in the state of Hawai'i. There are other areas in Hilo where mullet grow and you can catch them. But it's not designated specifically for mullet fishing. Therefore, there's other fishermen there. There's paddleboarders, there's kayakers and other folks enjoying the ocean. So, there's a little bit of competition in getting these very passive feeders to stay still and not get spooked. Whereas in Wailoa State Park, no watercraft other than mullet fishing boats are allowed past that double bridge there. (See "*Double Bridges*" on map.) So, as you see kayakers and stand-up paddle boarders and canoes come up. Typically, we kindly remind them that this area right here is strictly for mullet fishing crafts with electric motors, no gas motors, and so there's a big you know, rule behind why this pond is designated for mullet fishing and why other boat craft and again stand up paddleboarders etc. cannot pass the two bridges there. So, this is this is a special place.

TL: Do you feel like that's part of the draw is that it's sort of exclusive? Or is it just because it's easier because there's not people scaring the fish away?

DK: Well, it's actually both. As a mullet fisherman you enjoy the fact that this pond here in front of us is dedicated for this type of fishing and basically only this type of fishing. Whereas anyplace else you go in the bay, any place in the ocean along shorelines there is really no other designation except the quantity of fish you're allowed to catch and keep by means of its legal size, by means of whether it's in season or not in season. And so therefore, again, like in the state, I can't think of any one place more special than this. Because there is no other place like this.

TL: It's unique.

DK: It is very unique. And it's been standing like this for quite some time with this designation, I think after the 1960 Tsunami, which pretty much took out the whole village of Shinmachi, and Bayfront. This whole buffer zone, this whole green zone was kept like the way it is now. And so, when they started to build the Wailoa River Recreational Area, which we're here now, "Wailoa State Park" is what we call it, the whole intent was really to just build this as more of a community location. But the cool thing apart and about it, it has amenities of the pavilions, the walkways, etc. But it also has a boat ramp at the very far end, next to Waiakea villas for the mullet fishing boats, which is a smaller boat ramp so you don't have to compete with the bigger boats that are down there by the Ironworks.

TL: That must be real peaceful then.

DK: Yeah, yeah. So, you do have you do have that benefit of launching your boat from that small boat ramp there.

TL: Just right there on the left? (See "Boat Ramp" on map.)

DK: Yeah.

TL: Terrific. What's your first or your most vivid memory of this of this area? Or any real vivid memory of any of these aquatic places that you're connected to? Do you have anything that really stands out and that's really meaningful to you? Or do you have an earliest memory?

DK: One of the earliest memories I have is fishing in the Lanai pond near Just Cruisin' Coffee. (See "Just Cruisin' Coffee" on map.) So, the Lanai pond, which has a Hawaiian name which I can't remember right now, but the locals here call it "Lanai pond." And that pond used to have aquarium grass, which is the nice green weed that grows underwater that provides all the oxygen for your aquarium fish. Well, that whole pond had tons of lily pads and aquarium grass and the mullet used to just live and thrive and multiply in there. And growing up, in my early teens, we used to go there and fish for mullet and it used to just bite like crazy.

TL: Really?

DK: Yeah.

TL: And that was specifically in the Lanai pond? (See "Lanai Pond" on map.)

DK: Right, in Lanai pond. Because you probably needed a boat to fish in the rest of the bigger sections of the pond. But in Lanai pond, you can actually reach the water lilies and where the mullet lived, close to shore so you could actually reach them. You walk out on the grass a little bit and you cast out. Yeah, and I'll take you back there to kind of give you an idea of what I'm talking about.

TL: All right, terrific. And so, mullet are brackish water fish?

DK: Yes.

TL: So, you obviously can remember this special certain spot that they all really liked. Is that spot still there? Would you say it's still popular with them? Or have they moved on to a new place?

DK: Well, the turtles have consumed all of the aquarium grass in the pond. Seems to have been a delicacy for the *honu* for many, many years and over time, it just kept diminishing as the turtles I guess consumed it, the grass. So once the grass gets removed, which was the home for the mullet, the mullet then gets displaced. So, since they don't feel as safe, they move to other areas of the pond where there is other grass. So, they migrate around the pond and eventually when we get large enough, they hit the open ocean, they go in and out of the pond. Daily sometimes. And the babies, the baby fry, the baby mullet, end up living next to the grass just for protection. And as they grow older and get bigger, they become part of the bigger mullet schools that are migrational. They migrate in and out.

TL: So, is that a seasonal migration? Or is it based on the moon cycle? Do you happen to know?

DK: I have a theory. I don't happen to know exactly. But it is based on the months and it is also based on the tides. So, during peak tide months during the summer where you have very large highs and lows of high tide and low tides. In other words, when there's the Parisian spring tide of 2.9, 3 feet, 3.1.

TL: Real big ones.

DK: Right, the real large what they call “king tides.” The technical term is perigean, “perigean spring tides.” So, when it becomes that dramatic, where the high tides are three feet plus and a low tide is minus one foot where there's hardly any water in the pond. The fish then migrate out to the deeper oceans or the deeper waters. And there's pockets within the pond that they could probably hang out and stay, but they normally leave when it becomes super shallow. And then when the tides come back in, they come back. They migrate back in.

TL: That makes sense.

DK: So, did you see that fish jump across, you see the little splash?

*David points straight ahead of us.*

DK: That's a mullet.

TL: Really?

DK: When the mullet jump like that, that shows that they're happy or they're feeding.

TL: So, if they're jumping is that the time you want to cast?

DK: Correct. You want to go there and you want to get ready to fish in that general area. And every once in a while, when you see the mullet jumping, it's just a sign, but when you see them jumping continuously... That means that they're really feeding and it's a good time to go and try and catch 'em.

TL: Do they typically kind of hang out in schools together?

DK: Yeah.

TL: So, you see one jump...

DK: There's more behind, yeah. And sometimes they jump over like a 50-yard area. So, it's a big school. could have like 3-400 in one school.

TL: No kidding.

DK: Yeah. So, they would be feeding on the bottom, or maybe somewhere near the bottom, and then they turn and they flash and then they go straight off and they jump. And when you see that jump, that means they're feeding down below.

TL: Oh, interesting.

DK: Yeah. It's an indication that they're feeding.

TL: Wow, I wonder why they jump like that. Are they trying to, you know, mix up the silt at the bottom or?

DK: It's probably a combination. But when you see the very small baby mullet, like around two or three inches there on the surface and, and just swimming around occasionally when they swim in the school like that, they will jump too so I think it's like, genetics.

TL: Behavioral.

DK: Yeah, right. It's an indication of something.

TL: Good things, maybe. Communicating to their buddies “Eh there’s food right here. Splash, splash. Come check it out.”

DK: Something like that.

TL: Is there anyone in particular that that taught you about fishing or taught to you about fish? Family member?

DK: We used to come with some friends and their parents used to fish. So, they were like second generation mullet fishermen, my classmates. And I learned from them.

TL: About how old were you when you when you started getting into that?

DK: I might have been like... When I first started maybe like 12 started getting into it. Then more in high school. So, I was 15 16. When I got my driver's license at 15 and a half 16 I was able to drive myself around and come fishing and meet friends down here. So, it might have been around that time that I got more into the mullet fishing. I don't want to date myself but that's 40 years ago. You see that splash there?

TL: Was that a jump?

DK: Yeah. And right outside that area is where they feed. I'm gonna take you in the boat after this.

TL: Yeah, okay, exciting.

DK: And you can take video.

TL: Yeah, definitely I’m gonna want to take some pictures, see what kind of gear it is that you use. You mentioned that you make your own floaters?

DK: Floaters, yeah.

TL: What is it that you use to make your own floaters?

DK: I use cork and bamboo skewers.

TL: Oh simple, just homemade style.

DK: You wanna get some photos of it?

TL: Sure (*See Image 1.*)

DK: Got it?

TL: Got it. Thank you. And what is that that they’re dipped in?

DK: I use epoxy. And then regular epoxy primer, and then just regular fluorescent spray paint. And then I use model craft paint for this green part. And then I use a urethane clear over so it sort of holds everything together. But because mullet fishing you have to jerk the line to set the hook, they get all bust up, so I have to touch it up all the time.

TL: Really?

DK: Yeah. Especially if it gets a lot of fish.

TL: You get wear and tear over time yeah?

DK: Yeah, if you don't catch a lot of fish, your floaters look pretty, pretty good.

TL: So, you can tell a good fisherman by his floaters?

DK: Yeah, my floaters get really dinged up, because a fish hit it, or it hits against the boat. I mean, yeah, it's something that I constantly repair. If you have good floaters, you're three-quarter way in the game. Because the floaters make a big difference on whether you're going to know if the fish are biting or not. So, mullet fishing, and I'll send you these notes that I took. I'll just screenshot it and send it to you just for your reference in case you want to add more to your content. But what I wrote kind of describes how passive a mullet eats, how passively they eat, and how quickly they bite.

TL: Really?

DK: Yes. So, if you can imagine this floater sitting on the water, and you're fishing for six hours and this floater moves like this.

*David turns the floater vertically.*

DK: Maybe like once an hour. [If you turn away for a few seconds, you'll miss the bite, and that's frustrating. Mullet fishing requires patience.]

TL: Really?

DK: Yes. So, the way it feeds is sometimes very hard to detect when they suck the bait off the hook. And also the depth of the water and where the fish is in relation to the bottom makes a big difference too. So, over the years, you learn to adjust your bait, how you present the bait to the fish as a relation to how far off the bottom your bait is.

TL: I see.

DK: Because sometimes they pick it off the bottom, and sometimes they'll eat it when it's six inches off the bottom. And it changes, too during the day. So, it could be you could have a lot of bites at this depth, say the water is six feet deep. Hypothetically, you can have a lot of bites at five feet five inches, or five feet six inches, or five feet seven inches. But you won't get any bites at five-nine to the very bottom of six feet. You won't get any bites between here but you'll get bites right here.

TL: Interesting.

DK: Within like a two-inch gap. It's hard to explain but you have to get your depth exactly at the right preference for the mullet. Which is part of the art of fishing for mullet because you never know what depth they're going to be biting at. You see that park bench over there? Right across the cove here.

TL: Yeah.

DK: Okay. In the water. There's an orange flower, right?

*David points out a spot to our right. (See "Orange Flower" on map.)*

TL: Yeah, I see.

DK: You see it? Okay. Last year, the mullet was biting right there. It was biting at five feet two inches.

TL: Only at five feet two inches?

DK: Five feet two inches. If it was five feet six, five feet four, you might get touches, but you couldn't hook it. But at five two, your floater would do this.

*David holds the floater vertically.*

DK: So, this is the bite where the floater stick would stand up. Which means that the hook is right in the mouth.

TL: It means you Got 'em?

DK: Correct. that means if you jerk your pole back that means you have it on. Yeah. So, when you're too deep, and your floater just touches like this, you could jerk the line and miss it, because it's too deep. He's biting down like this.

TL: And then so the thing doesn't turn.

DK: Yeah. So, if you have it high enough, you know, when they bite and they feel the hook and they turn, the floater stands up.

TL: And so, you just have to keep dialing it in until you get it just right?

DK: Yeah. And once you start catching them, folks will ask you "How deep, how deep?" and you tell them the depth. So, your friends on shore or your friends next to you on the boat might ask you "How deep you got it? How deep is your line?" But in pidgin when they're excited "How deep, how deep?" they're just, everything comes out in pidgin. So, when people get excited, fishing for mullet, you got to know your depth. Okay, so once somebody gets a bite, and somebody catches one, usually you follow that guy. So, if somebody catches that, not you, but if somebody else catches, and you ask them, "How deep?" he go "I got 'em at 5'6"," then you change your depth, but give or take one or two inches, because as I show you, my leader has two hooks, I'll make one for you real quick.

TL: Mind if I take a quick little video of you doing that? (*See Video 1.*)

DK: No, go right ahead. So, I use fluorocarbon leader, eight-pound test and this seems to work very well, because fluorocarbon is strong, it doesn't have much flex, but because it's clear, the fish has a hard time seeing it. So, it works well under certain conditions where, you know, it might be like a cloudy day, and you know, they have a hard time seeing the leader lines, so they might be biting a little bit better if they can't see the line.

TL: The fish around here are wise to the game?

DK: They are wise. The especially the house mullet, the ones that have been around a long time. They're very smart, they know how to steal the bait, they can take the bait off your hook without you knowing. It's just very difficult to catch. Whereas the smaller ones and the medium sized ones, when they're sort of in that semi-juvenile stage where they might be like a pound, a pound and a half. When they bite and when they start eating, that's when it's really good fun, because sometimes the bite is one after the other. So, when you make the leader, you can usually do it in a branch, or in tandem, what I'm showing you right now is branch.

*David shows me a line with two hooks attached to it.*

DK: So, the rules state that the hooks have to be two inches apart or more. And that closer than two. Not two inches or less.

TL: Interesting. Do you know why that is?

DK: Because I think if you have it close together, you could actually snag it. If they're going for the bait on the top, and the bottom hook is really close to it, you can hook it outside the face. It's not really hooking it in the mouth, which is technically snagging it. So, I think that's why the rule was established. But I don't know exactly why. But I think that's the reason. So basically, you have your hooks separated like this. And what I was describing to you earlier was if you have presented your bait to the fish at the depth that they prefer eating at, you're going to see the floater twitch or move or even stand up or even sometimes they just disappear.

TL: That's when you really know you got a hit.

DK: Right, right. And of course, as I said earlier, the mullet is so passive when they bite that they might be eating the bait as it dangles in front of them and you may not even see this floater move at all and they can just take the bait right off the hook. The bigger ones know how to how to bite it off.

TL: Well, the big ones don't get that way by not being clever, right?

DK: Correct. Right. And, and so this is your typical setup. You put split shot here and each split shot will be counterweighted and balanced to your floater.

*David adds a split shot a few inches above the top hook.*

DK: So, if you had this on one end of your leader and five feet above that sitting on the surface is your floater.

*David holds the floater horizontally.*

DK: Then your floater is balanced to the amount of lead that you have hanging below. So, if you have too much lead, your floater's gonna stand up like this, which is ineffective.

*David turns the floater vertically.*

TL: And then it won't do any good unless it bobs really dramatic?

DK: Correct. or disappears, right. So, so your lead that you use on your leader has to be slightly lighter than what is needed to tip this over.

*David tilts the floater.*

DK: So, I have lead in here.

*David points to his floater.*

DK: So, it makes it easier to cast. And it's also counter weighted to this lead here. So, I know exactly how much lead I need here. Because I knew how much lead I put in.

TL: And so that's the benefit of making your own. And then keeping it maintained, right?

DK: Yeah, well, I just think it's you just have better luck when you make your own floaters. Because you took your own time and pride to make it. I just think it just comes out luckier that way.

TL: Yeah, well, you get out of it as much as you put into it. So, when you put more love in. You'll be more successful, right?

DK: Right. Yeah. So, that's the leader setup. And I'll just break it down now. You have pictures of it?

TL: Yeah, perfect. Thank you. Are there any stories about this place that you know of? Any *mo'olelo* or oral traditions, any fun stories that you personally had? Any silly or embarrassing times fishing?

DK: I don't remember any silly or embarrassing times. I mean, there might have been times that we help others. For example, rescuing others. Some folks fall in the water. They lose their balance. They may be older and they fall over and you go over there and you help them get back in the boat. I don't know if there's any silly stories. I know had fights on shore.

TL: Really? Over what?

DK: The mullet fishermen get upset with each other. They sometimes, you know, end up fist fighting.

TL: Oh, my goodness.

DK: Fist fighting on the ground, but rarely happens nowadays. Which is funny in a way because it's just mullet. But it can get intense sometimes. When you really want to catch a fish and it gets intense, if you don't know what you're doing, the regulars are the ones who do know what they're doing, they get frustrated. Because you have to pick up your slack. You have to watch where you cast you don't want to tangle anybody's line because it's super hard to untangle once it gets tangled. And it does take time, especially when the fish are biting, and you tangle somebody's line and they can't fish. That window when the fish bites, it might last a half an hour, we spent 15 minutes trying to untangle the line, which is last half of your potential time to catch as much fish as you can during that optimal period. Because if they're not biting crazy, like how I explained just for a short period of time, it's very slow the rest of the day, right? I mean, you might see the bite and you might be able to hook 'em, but they usually light up for a certain period of time right after the tide peaks, stratifies and starts dropping. So, right on top of that, right on the curve, yeah. So, when the tide starts dropping, they sometimes get active.

TL: Interesting.

DK: Yeah. So, there's certain times of the tide in which they get more active and into certain times of the day that they get more active. Sometimes late afternoon, early morning, and then it's slow in the middle. So, you just spend your time cruising around the boat.

TL: Come out in the morning, go barbecue for lunch and come back in the afternoon.

DK: You leave your boat somewhere and some guys catch crab or...

TL: Yeah, just fill the middle time.

DK: Right. Because it's usually really slow like they're not biting. They're not interested. They're very fickle fish.

TL: Really? Yeah, you did mention that they're not very aggressive eaters.

DK: No, they're non predatory. Very passive feeders. For a predatory fish, like a *Papio* or a *Moi* or even pelagics like *Ahi* and stuff, they will eat the bait and run and they basically hook themselves. Mullet, you have to set the hook.

TL: You have to be the one to yank it.

DK: Correct, right. When the floater goes up you have to set the hook otherwise a floater is going to go back down and the fish is gonna continue eating. You got a certain amount of time, literally seconds.

TL: So, you got to be ready to pull right when it's right.



DK: At the right time. And you also have to be watching that floater constantly.

TL: Right, if you look away, you'll miss it.

DK: You miss it, and your friends will see it, they'll yell at you, and you'll miss it and sometimes a late reaction you might hook 'em and sometimes most of the time you miss it.

TL: It gets away.

DK: Yes. Correct.

TL: And then you have just a less hungry mullet out there.

DK: And a smarter one because he felt the hook. So you might be more apprehensive of just eating every bait on the ground. You'll pick at it, you'll be one of those little touches again, right? You get a hungry one that eats it, he feels the hook spits it out floater, lands he'll know... that fish will know that there's hooks in the water, sharp things. I mean, but sometimes when it turns on it just goes off and they bite like crazy.

TL: Some days you just get lucky.

DK: Yeah, and they just hungry and it just continuously bite and it's a great day. You end up catching the limit, which is 10.

TL: That's pretty good.

DK: Yeah. And yeah, and then you leave the pond early. So, 10 is the limit. You cannot catch more than 10. There are rules for that and DLNR established that on the signs and in the fishing books... in the fishing guidelines, rules and regulations state that mullet no more than 10 mullets are taken every day, per fisherman. You can get 20 fish but no more than 10 mullet.

TL: I see, specifically mullet has to be only 10?

DK: Specifically mullet. I guess mullet was a delicacy. They don't want to over fish mullet. Over 10 years ago, they had a replenishment program that the Fed sponsored. It was called "Sem fish."

TL: Sem fish?

DK: S-E-M fish and it was a total replenishment program from breeding to releasing stock. They had implanted a metal tag in the heads of the baby mullet and they will let 10,000 mullet go at a time and they would then, after so much months, six months, a year, ask the mullet fishermen to check to see if we caught any tagged mullet. So, they may be at shore at the boat ramp asking for your catch and they would run the mullet through the scanner which is a metal detector. And if it beeps, then it's the one that they released. So, what they do is for research they scale it, they keep the scales, they gut it, they cut off the head, I think they keep the head too, and to give you back a clean fish. But they measure it and they do all the sizing so they can they can record the growth and the pattern where they caught it. They said they even caught tagged fish or they recover tag mullet they released in Wailoa River up in Waimanu Valley which is past Waipio Valley.

TL: Wow. So, they do actually travel pretty far.

DK: They do travel pretty far. And they've caught them down in Keaukaha. That means you have to go... and Mulletts like swim along the shoreline so they must have gone out of Wailoa, out of Suisan river mouth, and probably hug the shoreline, you know, go to the break wall, and then swim along the break

wall go right around the tip of the break wall, and end up somewhere down Keaukaha. Because they hug the shoreline. They're not the type of fish that will swim right across the bay. Mullet is not like that. They kind of stay...

TL: They don't make the straight line?

DK: No, I've never seen that. I mean, I've never seen mullet way out in the middle of the in the bay, but you see them more close to shore like 50 yards offshore.

TL: Sort of in more protected waters maybe?

DK: Yeah, I think so. But for the mullet to get up past Waipio to Waimanu, they must have gone along the shoreline. Hamakua shoreline, right?

TL: It's not like they swam to Maui and came back.

DK: No, they wouldn't have gone any other route but probably up Hamakua coast.

TL: That's incredible that they would travel that far though. That's cool, the kind of stuff that you can learn from things like from releasing and re-catching the fish.

DK: Yes, the irony was when they started that program. The two gentlemen that scanned my fish caught me by surprise because we didn't know what they were doing. Because I was like customer number one. I was the first one that they that they checked for tags. So, I didn't know what was going on with it when I saw two guys at a dock asking me for my fish.

TL: Thinkin' "Am I in trouble?"

DK: Could be, or like, "What are you doing?" And they explained what the program they had. And they gave me a cap because I was customer number one. But that was a that was so many 15 years ago, or 20 years ago. I can't remember. But it was a long time ago when that federal program started. And I believe it lasted 10 years.

TL: Wow. So, were they dumping fish every year?

DK: Every year, a couple times a year they had these huge mullet fry balls that they would release. Yeah, they would breed 'em internally and release them. Something like what Maria Haws is trying to do at the UH aquatics program down Keaukaha. Something like that. But they had, you know, they had a very large production. Kind of big budget to work with.

TL: I bet. Yeah, federal money is always good. So, during that time, it must have been pretty good fishing, right? They had a good population?

DK: It certainly added to the amount of fish in the water. We noticed there were... Yeah, just way more fish. But even after they stopped the program, we still had seen the massive amounts of schools of mullet populating, so it could have had a nice booster to it with a lag of several years past that.

TL: And they've maintained their numbers?

DK: Maintained. Yeah, even with the amount of fishing that we do, which we call "management," but with the amount of fishing that the mullet fishermen do, I mean, we took a lot of fish from the pond and there's still plenty. But over the years, it's been declining because the amount of illegal cross netting, the amount of poaching at night and legal throw nets too, but that's legal, which is fine. And just the amount

of mullet fishermen that have retired, and fish more often. And I guess as we perfect our craft, too we just catch more fish.

TL: Yeah. Overall, would you say that it was successful? You know, seeding more fish into here?

DK: Yeah, yeah. Definitely.

TL: Good. It's definitely good for the health of the ecosystem to have the fish that are supposed to be here. They occur here naturally, right?

DK: They do. For many, many years, even before and after the federal program started and ended there were massive amounts of mullet that came up this pond. Massive amounts, like schools of 5000, 6000 fish.

TL: That's incredible.

DK: Yeah. And the amount of fishermen that would line up to catch mullet was incredible, you had people lining up the shoreline. And they'd just be hooking mullet. When the schools around you'd have 10 boats and 20 Guys on land and everybody's catching. And it lasts for two weeks, and everybody catches for two weeks. And then the school moves and they start getting smarter. And then, the bite stops. But everybody remembers when the fish when the fish bites that well, and they keep coming back. And it's really part of the unique thing about mullet fishing is it's sort of addicting when you have to look at the floater and initiate and set the hook. And it's that part where you we set the hook when the floater stands up or moves or twitches or turns and you set the hook and you have it on. It's all you, because if you haven't... if you don't set the hook, that fish is not going to get caught. So, it's like a timing. It's your eye and hand coordination. So, it's kind of like a game.

TL: I can imagine you'd have to have good reflexes if you're gonna hook it. And how would you say that the area itself and the wildlife that lives here has changed over your experience here?

DK: Oh, I think the sediment on the bottom. I think the amount of naturally growing bait or *limu*, which we call it in Hilo, and elsewhere, the *limu*. The brown *limu* is what the mullet feeds on, when there's a lack of *limu* growing because there's not enough sunshine, or the water temperature, or the mixture of brackish to salt is not conducive for *limu* to grow, then we use bread. But the amount of food basically, that's available naturally in the pond is what accelerates or decelerates the growth of the fish. So, typically a mullet can grow just under a pound a year. So, if you catch a mullet that's four pounds, it's probably between four and five years old from what I understand, from what I was taught, how fast mullet grows. And so, the topography of the pond makes a big difference, too. Structure. There's parts of this pond where it's very rocky. And because the *limu* grows on the rocks, the mullet tend to feed better in the rocky area. And if there's cut trees that are falling into the water, whether it's branches underwater or their structure, sometimes *limu* grows on the branches and that's what the mullet feeds off of too. And there's certain areas in the pond that have deep holes and the mullets tend to kick up the mud there and feed in that area. And that's one of them right there. Right off that tip there. Where you see that fish jumping?

*David points straight ahead of us. (See "Casting Site" on map.)*

DK: That's one of the spots that has a deep hole. Elsewhere in the pond might be three feet, but right at the tip there is about six or seven feet. So, remember what I told you about the depth of the leader? How you present the bait? It's usually somewhere near the bottom. Six feet or so. So, I'll show you when we get when you get out there. Okay?

TL: Okay. Any memories or sayings or songs or anything that you want to share from your past? Any lessons that anyone really hammered into you about fishing when you were young?

DK: It's interesting that you use the word hammer because growing up fishing with the veterans of the pond, I used to get yelled at a lot.

TL: Really?

DK: Yeah, there was no etiquette. No speaking nicely. It was... They talk to you like they talk to their friends, so even if you're a teen, just learning, they probably don't want you around, because you'll probably mess up and get somebody tangled. And if you do show up, you better know what you're doing. So, it was a process of elimination where the better fisherman would end up fishing where the fish were, and if you were a little bit intimidated by not being as confident-of knowing that you can control your floater- that you know how to fight the fish and not tangle other people's lines. Yeah, so I say probably school of hard knocks. Today's culture is a lot friendlier and cordial.

TL: School of Hard Knocks for you?

DK: Yes no training. You just learned by mistakes. And if you get yelled at you just really learn quickly.

TL: Yeah, embarrassment is a good teacher.

DK: Oh, yes.

TL: And do you do a majority of your fishing now still in the same area? Or do you go out open sea? Do you have other spots that you like? Or is this kind of your home base?

DK: I've been coming here consistently for almost every weekend if I have free time, which I normally do have free time. So, I've been coming here to this spot pretty consistently, every week for the last three, four years at least. There are other spots that you can fish for mullet, but it's not as predictable as this. Like, I know the topography in this pond and I know where they swim and the pattern. And I know where certain fish are typically during certain parts of the tides. So, I can go there and check if they're there and then they sometimes they reveal themselves and you can fish for them. Like it could be calm like this, I pull up with my boat, drop my anchor and then they'll start jumping.

TL: Really? You just know?

DK: No, it's just by chance. Sometimes you looking for the fish and maybe the fish finds you. Because when you throw *palu* in the water maybe they think you're gonna feed 'em. So, when they see the boat, they think maybe you're gonna feed them. But I don't know, I mean it's just all theory. But yeah, this pond is probably my first go-to.

TL: And how has your attitude changed over the years as a fisherman? Have there been any significant changes in your styles or methods? Your equipment?

DK: No not really.

TL: Is there anything that you know now that you wish you knew when you were younger?

DK: Oh, yeah, the amount of experience I have now fishing. Knowing the pond the way I know the pond now, and the behavior of the fish. I probably would have caught a lot more before, but there were so many fish before that you still could be able to catch them. Even if you really didn't know what you're doing.

TL: Really, there was enough that the rookies could get in, too?

DK: Yes. You didn't have to be that technical. Nowadays, you have to be technical. And you have to keep adjusting until you find that sweet spot. As I described earlier, that how you present the bait, your equipment, what floater you use, even on a rainy day, what kind of line you use makes a difference. Like, 10% of the time, when the fish are really hungry, and it's biting, no matter what you do, you cannot do anything wrong, you just keep hooking one after another. But that is such a rare thing. Like, in the course of a year, you might get several hours, maybe two days out of the entire year, that experience. Other than that, it's that finicky bite that touches, you know, there's not really a strong indication that the hooks in the mouth but you try and jerk the pole anyways. You know where the hook is and how the floater is turning and it's in the mouth, right? That's, I guess what I would have... So, to answer your question, yeah, I mean, you know, the older you get, the more experience you get. So, if I was younger, if I had known what I know now, I probably would catch more fish.

TL: And what have you learned from fishing just about life? And how do you apply it to your life? What kind of life lessons?

DK: You got to practice conservation too, you gotta follow the rules, got to be mindful of others. I tend to try and teach others how to fish, take them fishing, show them how I fish, what I do to catch the fish, I'm no expert. But if they ask, I'm gonna share what I know. And there's some people that started fishing that are a little bit better now. And so, just that enrichment of knowing that folks out there can catch fish a little bit better now, it's rewarding. And also don't keep everything. Keep what you're going to eat or give away but, you know, never over fish. Always stop at the limit of 10 per day no matter if it's biting or not. If you catch 10, leave.

TL: That's your 10.

DK: Don't go over that number. I even like try to release some of the fish if it's not something I have a desire of keeping for consumption, I just let them go. You don't have to keep everything.

TL: Yeah, yeah. is size a factor in the ones that... I just saw one jump!

DK: Yeah.

TL: Yeah, that was cool. Is size a factor in the ones that you choose to keep it all?

DK: Yeah, you normally keep the bigger ones. [The legal minimum size is 11 inches from the tip of the mouth to the center of the tail.]

TL: And what's the biggest you've ever caught?

DK: This year? The biggest I caught was five pounds, two ounces.

TL: That's pretty good.

DK: Yeah, that was a monster. It actually went between two boats. I thought I was gonna lose it on the anchor rope, but it went between the two boats, and I ended up fighting it backwards like away from the crowd. So it was out of the way. The other times, you know, when you catch large fish, you're in the mix with the other floater. So, you try and bring the fish close to the boat and not let it run and tangle up. Everybody's line is deep to the bottom, and the fish can just get tangled in everybody's line and that's a mess. So, you want to you know learn to hold your fish and fight the fish in front of your boat, to bring it in right away and then you get 'em tired right in front of the boat and let the others fish farther out. So

that's what we've gotten accustomed to. And over time you try and learn that experience of how to control the fish if you can. Use a little bit bigger line so the fish wouldn't cut your line but yet you can control the fish in front of the boat. What else did I want to share? So, what I'm going to show you later when we get on the boat is that my main line is a braided line and it's nylon. It's a Berkeley line 14-pound test and it floats on the water. So, everybody who fishes mullet, their line has to float on the water because of two things: One, if it sinks, when you set the hook, if your line is not on the water floating where your floater is, that slack on the water is going to cause you to not set the hook correctly because you have to pull the line up and hook the fish on its top lip. So, the floater has to be on top of the water like this with your line floating on the top of the water. So, when you set the hook, when you jerk your pole back and set the hook, your hook moves up like this. Vertically, moves upwards, up and down. If your line was underwater, saggy, and your floater was up on top, when you jerk your line, your floater's gonna go down, but your leader won't move if your line's sinking. So, I'll show you that visually and you can then understand a little bit about what I'm describing.

TL: Do you have a favorite way of preparing mullet?

DK: I guess the local favorite is steamed. Steamed Chinese style with Chinese parsley and hot peanut oil.

TL: Ooh That sounds good.

DK: Steamed, yeah. Steamed with hot peanut oil poured over with green onions, cilantro and, you know, whatever other fixings you want. Some people would put *lup cheong*. Yeah, so there's different ways. That way, the Chinese style, and the other way, that is also special is black bean. Steamed with black bean sauce. It's another way that you can get it prepared by like a Chinese restaurant will do it for you.

TL: If you bring in the meat, they can prepare it for you?

DK: Yeah, and you pay that you pay the kitchen, like \$15 to \$25 and then they'll steam it for you make the sauce and all you gotta provide is an aluminum tray and they'll just put saran wrap over it and give it to you already cooked. And eat it with rice.

TL: Take it home ready to go. That sounds really good man.

DK: You never tried it before?

TL: No, I don't think I've ever had mullet.

DK: Oh. Well, maybe I can... you know what, maybe I'll get you. I can probably text you when I prepare it. Actually, I take it to Leung's.

TL: Oh, do you?

DK: What I do for my friends is like if they want to eat mullet I just I dropped 'em off at Leung's and I say oh, you know, "Torri's gonna come and pick it up at 5:30." So I can just prepay it and when you come, just say your name, and then you can just pick it up.

TL: That's really cool. I'd love to try it.

DK: Yeah, the Leung's kinda like by the Bank of Hawaii and Big island Toyota. That Leung's right on the main street, right? That's the one that I go. And they charge peanuts really to provide all the ingredients to steam it. To me, just doing the dishes is worth \$15. But they do everything for you. You just gotta clean 'em at home and then drop it off with your aluminum tray.

TL: Do you do that often? Would you say you eat that weekly or monthly?

DK: Well, actually, I don't eat the fish.

TL: Oh, you don't?

DK: No.

TL: You're just in it for the fun?

DK: Purely for the fun. And I give it away. I just give the fish away. Or folks who want to try.

TL: You just don't have a taste for it or you just prefer the sport?

DK: I just prefer the sport, I think. I don't catch the fish to eat the fish. In fact, I've never eaten... I haven't eaten the mullet in a while. But it is a local delicacy, and everybody wants it. And you can't buy it at the fish market. And if you do, if it's available, it's, you know, \$14.99 a pound. When it's available.

TL: And I bet it sells out real quick, too

DK: Well, if people want the fresh one, Yeah. I mean, you can go in Sack N Save and they'll bring some Australian or New Zealand frozen mullet that doesn't even taste like... I swear, in the past five years the mullet here's gotten super clean ever since... I mean, they've been eating bread for a while, but you don't really have that muddy taste like 20 years ago. 20 years ago, used to have this distinct muddy fishy taste. Even if you put lemon and bacon, steam it right with the sauce. There's a little bit of taste. But now the mullet tastes clean.

TL: You think they're just eating different foods?

DK: I think they're eating different foods. They're not eating like all the green *limu*, which makes it stink. I think they're eating more of the brown *limu* and more bread. Or whatever they're eating off the rocks.

TL: Maybe different from what was growing 20 years ago?

DK: Yes, change in diet from 20 years ago. It tastes really clean now. So even if like you're not a real hardcore fish eater, and you just like, you want to try it. I mean, a lot of people enjoy it. And you don't need the black bean style. Just the hot oil. And some people put their own shoyu on whatever. Is either with noodles or rice or...

TL: Chili water?

DK: Yeah.

TL: Good to know. I look forward to that for sure.

Okay. So, we're through the then and the now. I apologize, this is taking longer than I intended it to, but you've got so much good *mana 'o* to share with me that I don't want to risk missing out on any of it. So, looking ahead, in terms of educational outreach and restoration efforts, who is it that you're looking to sort of pass on your skills or your knowledge to?

DK: I don't have any goal in mind with regards to passing this on.

TL: Just any anybody who's willing to learn?

DK: Yeah, I think, you know, my nephew (*name redacted*) is pretty good. I used to take my nephew fishing when he was very young, and he caught on quickly. And he's great at fishing for *Ahi* and other pelagic type fish and that's what he loves to do. But occasionally when the mullet bites, he loves to come out and jump on my boat. Just show up on shore and I will pick him up so him and his son they both like fishing. My kids don't really like fishing that much. So, I'm not sure who I can directly pass it on to.

TL: What ways can younger people seek out information?

DK: If there's ever like a tutorial or a fishing camp or any kind of podcast that becomes available. Everything helps if you're brand new, because you have to start somewhere. And getting a mental idea of how everything works is the first step. You just don't show up to the pond and start catching on your first day. It's a mental preparation and it's getting the right gear. And then kinda lowering your expectations and hopefully getting lucky. You can do everything right in mullet fishing, but if you're not lucky you're not gonna catch. You have to be lucky too.

TL: How do you see yourself as a practitioner? What is your role in the fishing community? One more jumped right there!

DK: You see 'em yeah?

TL: Yeah, I see 'em now. How do you see your place in the fishing community?

DK: Well, I think because the mullet community is such a small participatory community, so small, just my observation of people who know what mullet fishing is has gotten a lot larger through social media and exposure. I think just being able to catch a few occasionally certainly does show others that the fish is still around and there's still good size fish out there.

TL: Helps not to get discouraged?

DK: Yeah. Not to get discouraged like "Why I'm not catching anything?" It's probably because you're doing everything right but you're not lucky or vice versa. Or it's the right timing of the day that you show up. So, just keep pursuing, just keep at it. Don't get discouraged. Things don't happen overnight. It takes years to develop mullet fishing skills. And they're not predatory fish they don't hook themselves by throwing out a piece of bait and lead like you may be accustomed to. It's very different fishing for mullet. It's a very... they're very passive feeders and it's really about finesse. Its part art and part science but you need finesse and to develop that skillset. Don't get discouraged if you don't catch, just keep trying.

TL: Keep trying, one day you'll get lucky.

DK: One day you'll get lucky and you'll figure out how that luck can turn into sharpening your skillset a little bit better and the next time you go, you might not just get one bite you might get two bites or three bites. And recognizing how the fish behave also is a very big part of it.

TL: Something that you also develop over time, right?

DK: Yeah, and the easiest way is you go with somebody who knows what they're doing. You just copy exactly what they're doing. The right depth the right bait and everything. And you increase your odds tenfold if you just have a buddy. A mentor or a guide or somebody who takes you to the fish and helps you catch your first fish. That's really what it's about. And once you get that feeling of having that fish on the other end of that line, then you get hooked. And then you wanna go back again and relive that endorphin rush. It's addicting that way.



TL: I bet. So, what is the biggest challenge that you've faced in fishing? Are there any difficult hurdles you've had to overcome? Any real serious setbacks?

DK: Yeah, sometimes your pole breaks. Sometimes the wrong fish bites, and sometimes you lose your pole because a fish pulls it in to the water. A mullet wouldn't do that but like an *Awa* would or a *Nenue* would. And so sometimes your anchor ropes break and then you lose a set of anchors it just makes your boat spin around and you're not stable. So something having to do with equipment failures probably 50-60% of the time other is weather. Like sometimes you could have thunder and lightning come down very close to the boats. And having your metal umbrella up or your pole sticking up, it's attracting anything like a lightning strike. It even can transmit like a partial strike. Like even if the lightning touched down close by within several hundred yards you still can get shocked if you hold something metal. It's happened to us before.

TL: Really?

DK: Yeah. You can feel it.

TL: What did it feel like?

DK: It feels like a shock. It's not a strong shock, but it's a zzt. You know if you're holding something metal... I swear at times we had weather similar to this wasn't really raining hard but it started raining hard and the fork lightening started to touch down. Bayfront near the hotel near Hilo lagoon and my hair was sort of standing up. It was so static-y the air. So, it was time to go in and before we had a chance to gather up all our stuff, you know, one came down pretty close by the tree and was like super loud. Super loud. And pretty much scared everybody.

TL: I bet. How scary.

DK: But, yeah, so weather. Equipment failure and... oh flash flooding. When that stream rises to the point where there's brown water and debris floating down, then it becomes a little bit more challenging to get to the other side of the pond. But I can't really recall anything other than weather and just my equipment. No real human problems.

TL: That's good.

DK: I haven't had any run-ins. I've seen others, but not myself.

TL: Are there any challenges that you foresee coming up for the future? Anything like water quality, change in populations of certain animals?

DK: I think could be maybe DLNR having different restrictions on the fish itself after monitoring how much fish there is. And changing the limit too, depending on the population size. Closing the season a little bit earlier. It could have a number of things that impact fishing in general. And as they tweak the rules, they can even charge for mullet fishing permits. That could be something that is being considered right now perhaps. No guarantees, but you don't know what's in store especially when you look at the cost of regulation, the cost of enforcement weighed against very little revenue coming in. I mean, we do pay our ramp fees and that has gone up tremendously. I think that just coincides with inflation and overall cost in general. The ramp fees has gone up from \$65, \$75 its now \$115 a year.

TL: And does that go up every year? Or every couple of years?

DK: It goes up usually every couple years. I think after the pandemic it went up quite a bit.

TL: Yeah, a lot of things did. Unfortunately.

DK: Yes.

TL: So, what would you say is the most important thing to take away from fishing? Or from the river? What life lessons are in there? What's most important to remember? What do you want future generations to know?

DK: I'm not sure. That's a good question. I would say practice... catch fish but practice conservation at the same time. Release undersize fish. Release fish if you're not gonna eat it. And I guess be mindful of the other fisherman. Be mindful of the native *Nene*, you know the native birds around the pond. Never leave hooks and lines unattended on the grass because the water fowl will get stuck and die.

TL: In some one's foot?

DK: Yes, someone's foot or the duck or the *Nene*. They get hooks and stuff stuck in them and if the line entangles their wings or their feet they will die. Because they cannot move they will die and so that's something that whoever's fishing has to be mindful of. Yeah. Conservation, no overfishing. Be mindful of the other ducks and the native *Nene* and always try and clean up after yourself. Never leave a mess. Respect the park. Keep the resource as pristine as you can. Always leave it in a better place than what you find it at.

TL: That's terrific advice.

DK: Of course. To me, its common sense but it has to be said because everybody may be cognizant of it.

TL: What is one message or lesson that you would like to pass on to the next generation of people that use this space?

DK: One message? Hmm... I would say to keep the Wailoa fishing area, the designated mullet fishing area, the same way the way it is today as it was in the past 50 years since 1969. Keep it the same way because there are other businesses that want to start, for example, kayaking businesses. Canoeing, boating etc. from Waiakea villas and they filed permits with DLNR and the county to start businesses where they are allowed to use this part of the pond to commercialize water crafting. That would certainly mess up the tradition of having this pond designated just for mullet fishing. You can start your business anywhere else. Below those two bridges is actually open to anybody. Canoes, any water craft. But above the double hump bridge is mostly for mullet fishing and water crafts, like my boat, that is suited for mullet fishing. So, try and keep it the same.

TL: Keep it the same and honor the tradition that has been here for so many years?

DK: Right. Let it go another 50 years 60 years, right? That would be my message is to keep it the same. Keep any commercializing of this part of the pond away. Like I said earlier, there is a lot of pressure for DLNR and others to look at starting boating businesses and stuff like that over there and we've actually lobbied against those types of business startups just to protect the pond itself and of course maybe a little bit of self-interest.

TL: Of course. You're definitely a stakeholder in the issue here. If they're going to be messing up your traditional cultural practice, and for some people, maybe even their livelihoods.

DK: Yeah, since 1969. This part of the pond has been designated for such a long time and generations of mullet fisherman grew up here.

TL: I think that's not much to ask to keep it as it is. Considering they have the rest of the whole wide ocean to go play and do your water sports commercially.

DK: Correct. Other locations like Reed's bay, Honoli'i, Keaukaha. Set 'em up anyplace else but here. Because here we already have a watercraft designation that is specific and it's been working well, so I would say don't disrupt that. Don't change it. [However, these alternate locations may also resist commercialization as well.]

TL: If you have the time still, I know this has gone on a little bit longer than I quoted you, but if you do have time, I'd be thrilled if you would take me out and show me a couple things.

DK: Let's go.

*We head to the boat ramp and board David's boat.*

[Interview Part II]

DK: So, you recall where you saw the fish jumping, right?

TL: Yeah.

DK: We're gonna go to that spot first, and I'll show you what I do to attract the fish. And if they're interested, you're gonna see them eating the bread. If they're not, they just gonna swim by... Did you see the wild Turkey?

TL: Is that what that is?

DK: So, right here the water is roughly maybe 6 feet, 7 feet deep. And you see my longer leader right here. I'll show you what I do. So, I fish shallow with the shorter leader right here. I fish shallow when the fish floats on the surface, but today they're not on the surface. I'll change to a different depth. Then I can get my bait down to the very bottom.

*David switches his leader.*

DK: Then I take my lucky floater. Usually only use one which is that one. Maybe that's why it's usually in need of a new paint job because it's overused.

TL: It gets all the abuse?

DK: It gets all the abuse. All the attention. What I do to tie the floater on the line is... watch. I make 3 loops in my main line, and then I loop it around that once and twice with a loop, and I pull it tight.

*David attaches his floater to the line.*

DK: So that is how I get the floater on the line. And you remember I mentioned on getting the bait like 6 inches off the bottom or directly on the bottom? This is what you do to check the depth. I'm gonna show you after we park how I figure out how deep the water is where I'm fishing.

*We continue towards the Casting Site.*

DK: So, the tide's about a medium tide, but it's still about maybe 3 feet right here. Maybe even less.

TL: Yeah, you can see the bottom real easy.

DK: Right. So, in the front of this little jetty or point that's sticking out, where the fish were jumping earlier, we're gonna approach them really slowly and directly in front of that point is about maybe 6, 7 feet depth right now which I'll show you when I check the depth with my leader. So, we'll park in about 3 or 4 feet of water but I'll show you how deep it is right now. See, that's an *Awa* right there.

TL: That's an *Awa* right there? Wow, that's a big guy.

DK: Yeah. That's a big fish. That's how I lose a lot of my bait. We're gonna line up sort of perpendicular to the point so I'm looking at it square. Drop the anchor. (*See "Casting Site" on map.*) So, see this lead right here, right? So what I do is I hook it onto the bottom hook, and check the depth right in front. So, right now it's maybe 4-and-a-half, 5 feet right in front of the boat here, but out there's a lot deeper. So, remember I told you how the stick stands up?

*David places the line in the water a few feet in front of the boat.*

DK: See, right now, my bottom bait is right on the ground. So, my floater is not gonna stand up, Ok? When I go out a little bit more...as it gets deeper to shallow, as I bring it in it gets more shallow.

*David throws the line out about 20 feet.*

DK: You see that stick's sticking up?

TL: Oh yeah.

DK: More shallow, it's gonna stick up even further.

*David slowly reels the line in closer.*

DK: You wanna get it right.... See, that's about 1 inch below.

*David brings the line in closer.*

DK: There. That's about the depth you wanna get it at.

TL: You wanna see both the orange and the green, yeah?

DK: Yeah. So, you see how much that was sticking out. To get it out there at the right depth I'm gonna show you what I do to achieve that.

*David casts the line out about 50 feet.*

DK: So, right now it's about minus 8 inches or so.

*David reels the line in.*

DK: So, people don't like it when you slide your floater up and down 'cuz it wears out the line. This nylon wears out, your main line. But, I just cut it off when it gets too frayed. I prefer sliding it.

*David adjusts the floater and casts again.*

DK: There, you see how close it is?

TL: Oh, yeah.

*A fish jumps near the floater.*

TL: Oh!

DK: Oh! See, that's too shallow. There's only one deep spot. It's way out there. Kay, the fish is out there.

*David opens a bag of white bread.*

TL: Yeah, good timing. Now, normally you'd be using brown *limu*?

DK: Usually right here, it depends. I probably would be using bread right here. When I fish on that side against the grass in the canal I usually use *limu*. This is what you do to get the bait in the water and down to the bottom.

*David dips the bread in the water and begins to mash it in his hand.*

DK: Otherwise, if you don't wet the bread, the bread will just float downstream. So, you mix, you break up the bread like this. And you throw it out in chunks.

*David throws the bread at the Casting Site.*

DK: I usually don't like to over-throw the chum or the bait like that. I usually just do it in little batches. Like maybe one slice at a time or so. So for fun we're gonna try and throw it out and see what happens, ok?

TL: Ok.

DK: Whatever we catch, if I do catch, which I highly doubt I will, but if we do, then we have to let 'em go. Because it's not mullet season and it's illegal to keep any mullet caught off season.

*David attaches bread to his hooks.*

TL: And when is the season?

DK: It's April 1<sup>st</sup> till November 30<sup>th</sup>.

TL: So it just ended, then?

DK: It just ended, right. So, if you had come back from Kaua'i earlier, we could have actually did, you know, where you actually fight a fish. Well, actually, you can still fight the fish, you just can't keep any today. Until April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022. But, yeah seeing that floater twitch or stand up and wave. You know, if we're able to like set the hook. That is what you live for. You gon' stare at that thing for an hour, it's not gonna do anything. Keep checking your bait, checking your bait. The fish are all over there, they're coming up, they're floating.

TL: I see some disturbance on the top of the water there.

DK: Yep. But, remember, the fish has all that volume. They're down on the bottom, they're up on top. But where do they bite? I don't know. Right now, I'm just fishing the bottom 'cuz eventually all that bait will flow down to the bottom. And if they're hungry, they're gonna eat one or two baits off. And if they're around, and I'm too deep...

*David reels in his line.*

DK: Ok I'm too deep you see that? They ate the top one off. So now I know that they're near the bottom or at least 4" above the bottom.

*David attaches more bait to his top hook and casts again.*

TL: Do you know by any chance what the average lifespan of a mullet is?

DK: It's usually 5 years, 6 years. Depending if they live that long. If they don't get caught before that. You know, if they get caught, or a predator eats them or injures them, maybe the average lifespan for most of 'em could be like 2 years or a year and a half. When you see the bigger ones that come through, they're four, five, six years old already. And they probably don't live past that. I mean, once you get 6 pounds or so that's probably towards the tail end of that life.

*David reels in his line.*

DK: I smashed the bread on there, they're eating it so they're out there. Now, we won't stay here long 'cuz I don't think that they're gonna turn on and we'll be able to catch anything here, but I can take you to another place that might have the fish, too. I can try. And then take you in Lanai Pond and probably don't know where else you wanna try and go.

*David casts again.*

DK: But it's kind of peaceful out here, right? No matter if it's raining or sunny.

TL: Yeah. It's really nice.

DK: You just look at the water and you see that floater tail tip up or turn suddenly.

TL: And *Hanapa 'a*.

DK: Yeah. You just set the hook. And you'll never know. You might be doing something. Daydreaming looking at somewhere else and it's gonna happen and you gonna miss it. But, that's part of fishing. That's the one that got away.

TL: It must be great for things like patience.

DK: Oh, definitely.

TL: A little bit of self-reflection. Some 'me time' out here.

DK: Yeah. And then when it's biting, then it's of course a lot of action. It's just really exciting, yeah? To see the thing stand up and you hook it, you bring it up to the boat, you throw out again the thing stands up, you know, it's just like a game.

*David reels in his line.*

DK: Look he ate two baits. They're out there. Definitely out there. So since I'm on the bottom, maybe I'll bring it up like 6" or so, make it a little bit more shallow so they have to come up for 'em. So that whipping action that I just showed you is kinda what I do to set the hook.

*David applies more bait.*

DK: So, when you put the bait on the hook, you try and put a little pressure around the bread. You wanna keep it fluffy but you wanna also make it sort of firm like this.

*David casts.*

DK: And we'll see if it actually makes any movement on the floater as they try and bite it off. And sometimes you use bigger pieces, sometimes you use smaller pieces. It really depends. Because there hasn't been a lot of mullet fishermen in the pond for the last 4 days, this bread is probably like steak to

them right now. So, the less bait in the water, the better. But, they're smart already. It's the end of the season, they're not gonna be biting crazy like at the beginning.

TL: They know all the tricks already.

DK: Or, all the dumber, hungrier ones you caught them already. The remaining mullet are very smart. Survival of the fittest, and you gotta have that. And that's why when I catch and release a lot of the small to medium size ones, they mix back with the school and the school becomes smarter because they don't bite as crazy. It's survival of the species. So, you saw how hard I pressed it down, right?

*David reels in the line.*

DK: Look. Where's the bait?

TL: Wow. So, they're hungry then, right now?

DK: They're eating it off. And the floater's not moving, right? So, how hard do you have to make the bait for them to eat it off without making this barb go through their lip, right? As they try and eat through this hard bait. So, I'm really smashing it on now. The previous cast I had not pressed it on as hard.

*David applies more bait and casts again.*

DK: So, now it's pressed on really hard. And they gonna really try and...

TL: They're gonna have to really fight with it.

DK: Or they might say "It's too hard" and swim away. 'Cuz they're smart already. They don't wanna bite into the hook 'cuz they know the hook's in there. I think they all felt the hook before.

TL: That's probably a safe bet, there's probably not any that haven't at least...

DK: Felt that hook. Maybe got away. Maybe they're hooked on for a little while, got away or they just felt the hook and they spit it out. They not in the frenzy mood right now. And the more bait I throw in the water, too, it just feeds them because they know how to eat the chum or the *palu* vs. the one on the line. They're smart. At least right now they are.

TL: So, come the start of the season, does that mean we have all these little greenhorns in there that don't know the ropes?

DK: Yep. All the smaller ones that grew up to be juveniles now, they're hungry, they don't know what the hook feels like. And there's more of them so there's competition.

TL: So, they're a little more aggressive?

DK: Definitely. Yeah, so when they bite, they not just nibbling, they just eating. It's a big difference. But to come across a juvenile school in the eating mode, that's another subject. It's not that easy. But, being that it's off the ground, and it's hard, the bait's hard now, let's see how much comes back.

*David reels in the line.*

DK: See, they're not coming up for 'em. Right? So, it's just 6" shorter.

*David casts again.*

DK: I'm just gonna bring it in where it's a little bit more shallow. So now it's near to the bottom. Or either on the bottom or near to the bottom vs. out there. Because out there I made it 6" shorter. As you bring it in it gets closer and closer to the bottom, so they might pick it up. Which I really doubt right now. It would be a miracle. If you see that floater stand up, I think it's because of you. I think it's because you're lucky. You're the luck.

*David reels in the line.*

DK: Let's pull anchor and try and go elsewhere.

*We head toward Lanai Pond.*

TL: This is just debris that flows in?

DK: Actually, they cut the trees around the edge of the pond and the trees fell into the water 3, 4 years ago. So, the trees are just stumps now. But all the little branches and leaves have been long gone so it's just like big stumps in the water. But it's still structure because the mullet like to live in there.

TL: Is that shelter for them? Or is it just something that food grows on?

DK: Little bit of both. 'Cuz when the predators come in, they hide in the branches and the bigger *Papio* or *Ulua*, they cannot go in the branches. You see this African Tulip tree in the front here? We gonna go there and kinda cruise pretty close and I'll show you. Where the branches are sticking up, that's where the fish are. It starts here, but actually, the fish are more straight ahead by this African Tulip tree. [See "Tree Debris" on map] You'll see all the branches in the water below, and if you can imagine kind of a network of branches all along that bank there of previous fallen trees and stumps and tree trunks and that sort of thing, and the fish live in there. They swim on top, they swim below. And they come out of there when we throw the bait in the water in front the branches and that's where it bites. You see those branches sticking up right there? The fish are usually in there although I can't see 'em right now. If there were any fish to bite, it would bite right there. But I don't see any right now. So we're gonna take a quick tour into Lanai Pond. (See "Lanai Pond" on map.) This pond historically had all this aquarium grass that used to grow on the bottom along with lily pads and stuff. It used to be a very thriving mullet spot where the babies and the parents thrived. You would catch so much mullet in here before the turtles got here and ate all the grass. Now it's just basically mud and some other things. Not mud, but like moss and *limu* and stuff that grow on the bottom. There's not too much structure.

TL: It's interesting that turtles would come up this far. You usually associate them with sticking to the salt water. You'd think they wouldn't like the brackish. But I guess if their food grows here, they follow the food.

DK: For years they came up here and started eating that grass. This whole pond was grass and they basically cleaned 'em out. And you see them along the shore just propped up on the embankment resting. Sometimes it eats the California grass. The lack of vegetation in the ocean, when they come up here, they're hungry. They tend to eat whatever. They'll even eat the roots of the grass. You can see the grass shaking, and they're underneath eating the roots. The grass is just shaking from the turtles.

TL: Wow.

DK: So, this pond here is relatively shallow, so right now it's about a medium tide. Straight down is only about 2 feet. And there's tons of fish in here right now, you just can't see 'em. They see us way before we see them and they're like ffft, they right into the sides. In the cove over there you can see some ripples on the surface. Right in front of us, you see ripples. These are all mullet.



TL: All of those are mullet?

DK: Yeah. You see right there?

TL: So, they kinda hang around the edge, you said, right?

DK: Yes. When they see the boat they go towards the edge. Right there in the cove, in the corner there, you see those ripples? Not all of them are right at the surface. Some of 'em are like a foot below. So, if I had *limu*, they probably would bite, but the fish in this pond barely bite bread. For some reason, they don't. It's like they not domestic enough. It's only the ones that follow the deep route pattern that I was explaining.

TL: Oh, I saw that!

DK: That's a baby one. But I was telling you, they start jumping early for nothing. I don't know if they're feeding down below or what's going on. There's a big school there we just scared. There's more right here, too. These are all smaller. I would say maybe 8 inch. Not even legal size. So when you think about the propensity of regeneration, regenerative food supply, the grass here serves a purpose 'cuz it protects the babies up until the very small juveniles...the kindergarten to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade size... pre-legal-size fish from getting eaten or fished because they all hide in the grass here.

TL: It acts like a little nursery for them?

DK: Yes It's protection from the predators. The predators swim by, they just run all in the grass and the *Papio* can't get to 'em. So, the grass kind of serves as a necessary protection or house for them. So, another spot that was pretty active was over here on the surface along this grass against the backdrop, that line of grass sometimes has bigger ones floating. If I threw all this bread in the water, they would eat it all. Usually like *limu*, when you throw the *limu* in the water, they'll come up and eat it. Bread, for some reason, they'll wait till it gets to the bottom and then they'll pick it off the bottom or near the bottom. Because *limu* is a natural food source. It's a natural product of the ocean. Whereas bread, there's nothing like it in nature. But they eat it, so, oh well. So, this is another favorite spot I used to catch the floaters you know, with my short leader? The one I was showing you earlier, that short leader. They used to float on the surface, I used to pick 'em up right over here. Same floater. So right now, about midday, the fish is very difficult to find. Right when it gets to about 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock is when they start coming to the surface and jumping more. They become more active. I don't know why. A lot of my experience comes from early morning or late afternoon catches.

TL: So, they're more active in the morning and the evening?

DK: Sometimes. Sometimes I'm leaving the pond and... you see that right here? Something's following us. This is the mullet, I think.

TL: You think so?

DK: Yeah. Or *Ulua* or something. Right here. You see this wake?

TL: Yeah, I see the bump.

DK: It's probably an *Ulua*. Oh, look there's 2 of 'em! Oh yeah, I can see them. There's 2 *Ulua*. Not very big. Maybe 20 pounds. They're looking for the mullet as well.

TL: So, the *Ulua* come in here and feed on the mullet? The littler ones?

DK: Yeah. Even the big ones. Not the 4-pounders, but the pound, pound-and-a-half. The legal size. You see them on the surface here?

TL: Oh!

DK: See them jumping?

TL: Yeah!

DK: Yeah, they're here.

TL: You definitely have a better eye for it than I do. I don't see them until they jump.

DK: I can see the swirls and stuff. That's what I get. There's one more.

TL: There's plenty right here! Oh my gosh, there's a grocery cart right there.

DK: Yeah, that's been there for the whole year. Coming up this canal, which we call "Café 100 Canal." So original. (See "Café 100 Canal" on map.) See right in this grass pocket right there, that's where the fish hang out that's a little honey hole. (See "Honey Hole #1" on map.) I caught so much fish out of that honey hole this year. It's been great. But you need *limu* for that. Bread doesn't work. There's a little secondary honey hole coming up. It's just right past this grass. Right here. You see the *Nenué*? That's *Nenué*. That also takes your bait. Ok so, right in here there's a honey hole. (See "Honey Hole #2" on map.) You can see the fish coming out. I can see 'em. Look 'em, look 'em there's some more. All this is all mullet.

TL: All these is mullet?

DK: About 30, yep. I can see 'em all swimming by. They're feeding on the ground right here in the shallow, they kicking up the mud. They're up there jumping too. This canal has different spots. This used to be a honey hole, but there's no fish over there now. Caught 'em all.

TL: Is that a mullet right there? He's a biggun!

DK: Yeah. Get some big ones. You can see 'em right? Down below.

TL: Yeah, yeah. What is that right there? Is that a Puffer fish? Right here, this guy.

DK: Yes, that's a Balloon fish.

TL: He's big! Hey fella. So many species that you would think wouldn't come into brackish waters.

DK: I think like 100% of the fish come up. *Moi*, 'Ō'io, of course the mullet, the *Awa*, *Palani*, *Nenué*, Puffer fish, Balloon fish, right? You see the *Nenué*'s right here? Coming up in the shallow. They hide in the grass, you see? They went for the grass. There's a big *Tilapia* there I saw.

TL: Is that what that is?

DK: Yeah. Huge *Tilapia*. See the dirty water right here? There's some mullets. I normally don't go this close to the honey hole because I spook 'em, but because we're not fishing you can just go and look.

TL: Oh, wow like 20 just went that way.

DK: Yeah. Mullet's right?

TL: Yeah.

DK: They're fast. They're all in the grass too, right here.

TL: They're bigger than I thought they would be.

DK: So right now, they're all hiding in the grass because they see our boat. So, all against this grass is where the fish live. There, you see out there? See the ripples?

TL: Yeah. You think that's the *Ulua* again?

DK: No, I think that's mullet. They gonna turn when they see the boat.

TL: Right there, wow! Look at them all!

DK: There are just a few on the surface but you see how much there are below? So deceiving, yeah? They're all about 3, 4 pounds. That's the big ones. They're not like the little ones that jump. When the little ones jump, down below you got the bigger ones. So that school is always there. I see there's something on the surface in front of us, let's go check that out. See it cruising on the surface? Could be a mullet, could be that *Ulua*. For a wake that big, it's probably a pretty good size. You see the fins coming up? That's probably *Ulua*. Now I can see him. He's a good size. Coming right to us. See that *Ulua*?

TL: Look at him!

DK: It's huge. 25, 30 pounds.

TL: You think?

DK: Oh, it's skinny... no he's not that big. It wouldn't be able to eat the big mullet that we saw.

*We return to the boat dock.*

-- END OF INTERVIEW --