

**Henry Nalaielua**



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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Henry Nalaielua (HN)

Kalaupapa, Moloka'i

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BY: Jeanne Johnston (JJ)

HN: . . . notice was, the tide was high because the water was above that concrete walk going out. The water was above that already and there were barrels rolling out and there were boxes rolling out, too. And that's the first view I had of the tidal wave when they woke me up.

JJ: Do you remember what time it was then?

HN: About six something. I can't remember the exact time. I mean, who knows? I got too excited after that, nobody kept the time or cared to look the time because there was too much excitement going on by then.

JJ: So then what happened? Where were you? Where was the house that you were staying in?

HN: Oh, I was living way up there. Nicky and I were roommates by that time. I don't know if he told you that?

JJ: Yeah, he did.

HN: Yeah. And when I got up, he got up too and we started looking, "Wow, what the hell is this?" And then everybody start waking up and then we started to get on cars, you know. There were cars that were going to come down and look what was happening. And before breakfast, I think it was before breakfast, the first thing we jumped on was the truck. And we came down to here, went around this way, and what we saw was, my remembrance or recollection of it is, that the supervisor was coming down in his car, and the wave was already going back, the water was already receding. He got caught in it. But he really didn't know that he was caught in a tidal wave because he kept driving his car down like it was a normal day. And this guy, Rico, yelled at him from the store and ran down after him and told him, "Hey, get out of your car, you going to go out in the water."

And he didn't even know what he was talking about so the guy opened the door, dragged him out, and took him up the store. And the car went down and then stopped right there. I don't know where we went from there, but I think we were going to go down to Papalooa, to the graveyard section but we couldn't because it was full of water already. So we went up to what we call McVeigh home, and from there, we saw the second wave come in. And it smashed everything that you could see within your eyesight. All the beach houses that were there was just turned into toothpick. There were several houses that were standing there before the tidal wave. One was

inside the coconut grove and there were two more over, farther over to where the pavillion now stands. Where the pavillion is now standing, there used to be a beach house that used to be owned by the guy that worked in the laundry. His name was Spud. Spud didn't even know his house was gone. But we could see from Baldwin home, we could see the roof of his house going out.

JJ: Oh wow. Was anybody in any of those houses?

HN: No, no. There's nobody in the house. There was one woman whose house was moved on the middle of the street, right by the Mormon church, where the Mormon church is. I don't think—I don't know whether she was home or not. I don't think she was, because otherwise she would've been screaming bloody murder or something. But anyway, the point is, it parked right on the road, just left it there without damaging the house or nothing. Then we went back home, I guess we were too excited to eat breakfast, so we kind of ate and then we came back. And then we went down to the rubbish pile, what they call a rubbish pile at that time. That's where we dump all our refuse.

We were standing there, and then the third wave was coming back from that way. Coming back. We stayed there till it was almost on top of us. Then we took off. Came through the bush. You could hear all the bushes—that rustling in the bushes of the water coming. Then from there, we went—we wanted to go to down to Papaloa again, to the graveyard area but the sheriff had already blocked the road so we went up McVeigh home side and we went down, even though there was water in the pond, we still went. We went down as far as red camp and came back.

JJ: What did it look like down there?

HN: Nothing but water, everything inundated. Beach houses flat out—it used to be what we call a red camp. That was torn to smithereens. Coconut trees and all gone.

JJ: What did the name red camp mean?

HN: Because it was painted red.

JJ: Oh, it was red, huh? I didn't know.

HN: That used to be the construction camp before but they moved it over here so it would be closer to the settlement. That thing was just like toothpick, too. It was scattered all over the place. There was a place we called fish pond, that place was flooded. The road to the airport was flooded. The airport runway was all under water.

JJ: Oh my goodness. So when the third wave went back out again and it didn't take all the water with it then. Did it take . . .

HN: No, no, it didn't take any water back. It just receded out. But you see, from what I'm looking, I'm judging—this is only my judgment and I have no idea of what tidal wave is supposed to be about. The first wave was just the biggest. The second wave was not as big, but quite big. And then the third wave was the last one that came. That was a small one that came by. See, the first wave is actually the one that wrecked everything. The first wave is the one that went right up the river. Right up to the pine tree area where we have, you know. We went up there. When it receded, we went out. We went up there to pick up fish.

- JJ: Oh my goodness. So there were fish up in the river.
- HN: Fish all over the place, even at the graveyard site, what we call the baseball field. All fish in there. We were there—I think we were the first ones out there with our net. In the evening, as soon as everything was over, went down with our net, collect fish. Brought them home.
- JJ: So there was nobody injured then.
- HN: No, nobody was hurt. Nobody was killed. No.
- JJ: Then, how did the damage get cleaned up and did the military come in?
- HN: No, no. There were no (military) crew for here. The regular civil service employees did the work. There wasn't much damage per se, except for the beach houses, which got swept out anyway. There was nothing left of the beach houses. They were all in the bushes so that didn't take much. All you had to do was clear the debris off the road.
- JJ: Did they rebuild the beach houses out there?
- HN: No, that was all private houses. The state would not build. See, if you build beach houses out there, you build them on your own. That was that kind of ruling since it's not state property. And the red camp, even though it was state property, they had already been living down here so they didn't bother with it.
- JJ: What about the graveyard? Did it move any of the gravestones?
- HN: Oh yeah. A lot of stones, headstones and wooden crosses, got pulled out and strewn all over, under the water and everything. And when the water finally went to the ground, they found a lot of headstones over there, but we didn't know where they belonged.
- JJ: So there was no map of where they had been to begin with?
- HN: No. Now they have it.
- JJ: What did they do then? What did they do with the headstones since they didn't know where they belonged?
- HN: Just put them on the grave and hope it's the right one. We weren't looking for names because there wasn't anything we could do about it. Wooden crosses, no sense putting them back because they were pulled out of the ground. You couldn't go back and look for the holes because the holes were all covered up already anyway.
- JJ: How long did it take all the water to dissipate from the land?
- HN: God! That's something I don't remember. I know it took more than three days. I think it took about, roughly about a week and a half, I think.
- JJ: Wow.
- HN: Before we got rid of all the water. Well, it would've gone down easier and better, I think, if there was places for the water to run out, but there wasn't any place to run 'em, so I don't think so.

- JJ: What about the fish? What did you do with all the fish?
- HN: Take them home, fried them, boiled them, made soup. Ate it all up.
- JJ: Everybody had fish, huh?
- HN: Yeah. Good fish, nothing wrong with it.
- JJ: Did it do some damage to the administration building down here?
- HN: Yeah. It picked up the administration [building]. The main door was facing—like this is the administration door, where you sit near is where the warehouse, the administration building is here. The main door was here, facing the warehouse. It picked up the administration building, turned it right around when it dropped the building. The main door was facing O‘ahu. And they left it that way. Yes, that’s where the entrance became. They left it that way until they built the new one up here.
- JJ: Oh my goodness. How long did it stay there like that?
- HN: God, about---whew. I don’t remember exactly when they built the. . . . I think about ‘48, I think—’48 or ‘49. Maybe little later. I can’t remember when the new administration office was built.
- JJ: Did it take out the electricity or the water or anything here? Did it damage your electricity?
- HN: It took our water line.
- JJ: What did you do about that?
- HN: It didn’t bother the electricity but it took out our water line. It took out about, roughly, I would say about a quarter mile worth of pipes. And we had to go back in and connect them all back because we didn’t have the eight-inch pipes, reduced it to two-inch pipes. Reduced it down to two inches then had it connected it up again so that we could use it.
- JJ: How did you get your water while you were waiting to fix it?
- HN: There was water in the reservoir so we used that only for drinking purposes or cooking purposes. We were trying to—people not to take a bath. You wanted to take a bath, go down the ocean or go up the river. So most of us were using the rivers to take a bath. Most of us young guys, anyway. We used to go up to Wai‘ale‘ia [stream] and take a bath.
- JJ: How long did you say that it took to get the water pipes fixed?
- HN: Oh, about five hours. We volunteered—we were the Boy Scouts at that time—we volunteered to do the work. And we hand carried a whole length, sixteen feet of pipes, we carried on our shoulders. Making the trip back and forth, back and forth.
- JJ: Wow.
- HN: Until we got all the pipes in. (The plumbers) were able to get the pipes back into working order at the end of the time that we finished. They took more time than we did because all we did was just

drop the pipes.

JJ: I see. So, did somebody bring water in? Did anybody, the military or anybody, bring water or anything?

HN: I seem to think there was water that was brought in at that time because of the fact that they were repairing the pipeline. But I don't remember ever using it. I guess because we were young and full of life, we just went up the river to collect water or to take a bath or whatever.

JJ: How did things change? Did you notice any change in the community around here after the tidal wave?

HN: Because of the tidal wave?

JJ: Yeah.

HN: I don't think so. I don't think the community changed at all. Everybody was scared, real scared, but since we didn't lose any lives and the biggest damage was to our pipeline and some people did leave their cottages or beach houses. Other than that, nobody got worked up over it. Because they knew that this was something that nature created, or Mother Nature.

JJ: Did it make you scared of the ocean or. . . .

HN: Well, for me, it made me respect the ocean more. You got to when you see something like that. Especially if you come close to it. And the wave about from here to the cottage. You got to respect it. But being scared, it was about the only time I was scared. Other than that, we weren't really worried. At least I wasn't.

JJ: At first you thought it was an April Fools' [Day] joke.

HN: That's right. That's why I didn't get up.

JJ: Oh my. Were you here during the 1960 tidal wave also?

HN: No, I wasn't here in the [19]60s. I was gone. I was living on the outside.

JJ: Okay. Is there anything else that you can think of about the 1946 tidal wave that you'd like to add?

HN: Shee, really not much. I guess what everybody has been saying to you is what I'm saying, it's just a repeat. I don't know how many people you've interviewed.

JJ: I've---you're the fourth. Everybody remembers different things, though, you know. Did you see the ocean floor when the water was receding out?

HN: Yeah.

JJ: What did it look like when . . .

HN: Oh, naked. (Laughs) One word: naked. Yeah, we were down at the rubbish pile when the water receded. And then when it came back, it just swept right back.

JJ: How long did it take, do you think, in time? Do you have any concept of time of it going out and coming back in?

HN: It didn't take long. I don't think it took more than ten minutes for that thing to go out and come right back again.

JJ: How far out did it go? How far could you see it?

HN: About seventy-five yards, more or less. I can't really measure depth of the ocean, not at that time anyway. But I would say maybe seventy-five to a hundred yards, roughly.

JJ: Is there a big drop-off out there?

HN: Yeah.

JJ: So you could see the . . .

HN: Yeah. Big drop.

JJ: What about fish? Did you see fish floating?

HN: Yeah, yeah.

JJ: Did it make any noise when the water went out and came back in?

HN: Oh no. Only that rolling over the rocks and everything. Taking the rocks back with it. Except for that, nothing any different. You couldn't tell when it was coming because it didn't make any sound but when it went out, when she start pulling the rocks and everything back, you could hear all that noise.

JJ: Okay, well thank you very much, Henry. I appreciate this. If you have anything else you'd like to add before. . .

HN: No.

JJ: Okay, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW





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