

**Bennet Baldwin**



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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bennet Baldwin (BB)

Pā'ia, Maui

July 17, 1998

BY: Jeanne Johnston (JJ)

JJ: This is an interview with Bennet Baldwin at the Maui Country Club in Pā'ia, Maui. The date today is Friday, July 17, 1998, and the interviewer is Jeanne Johnston.

Let's start with your---would you give me your name and when and where you were born?

BB: Bennet Baldwin. I was born in Kula, in June 1939.

JJ: Let's see—give me the name of your parents.

BB: My father was Richard Baldwin, also known as Manduke, and my mother was Harriet—also known as Haku, and her maiden name was Damon.

JJ: And what was your dad doing when you were born?

BB: He was a manager of Haleakalā Ranch.

JJ: Okay. So, let's see. You were born in 1939. And do you have any brothers and sisters?

BB: I have an older brother and a younger sister.

JJ: And, let's see, you grew up in that area. Can you describe Kula to me when you were young?

BB: It was very rural, compared to now. Quite a few residences around and we lived in a corner of the ranch. And we were able to go right out on the ranch from the home.

JJ: What did you do for playing when you were a kid? What kind of games and. . . .

BB: Well, we did some cattle work with my dad. And we played tennis and golf as we were growing up and that type of thing. Swimming.

JJ: And where did you go to school?

BB: I went to school at Kaunoa School, in Spreckelsville, grammar school, and then my senior year I

went to Punahou [School], and then I went to Cornell [University] after that.

JJ: And Cornell is in. . . .

BB: New York.

JJ: New York, okay. So let's see, tell me a little more about the lifestyle in Maui as you were growing up.

BB: I don't know what to say. The lifestyle was very rural. It took quite a while to drive down the mountain. It's a winding road even down the mountain. The road to Lahaina was a real—quite a bit of a trip 'cause it was a real winding. . . . It took couple hours to get to Lahaina from this side. And, well, maybe not a couple of hours maybe an hour and a half or so, but it was a good bit of a trip. And, I don't know, lifestyle was just a normal thing. School things, and ranching activities on the ranch and that type of thing.

JJ: Did you do any fishing, or much ocean. . . .

BB: Mostly when we were little, yeah, we did. We trolled in Spreckelsville when we were youngsters when we had a beach house, which was damaged by one of the tidal waves. We did troll on Spreckelsville coast. [In] Hawaiian it's *Kapu ka Ulua* meaning "private for the *uluu*." And we caught quite a few *pāpio* off our little skiff.

JJ: Do you remember how many houses there were down there in Spreckelsville at that time, in the [19]40s?

BB: They're about the same number now. There may be a few more houses now. But the Spreckels—the stable road which we were on had not many more houses in it. In fact some of them were lost in the tidal wave. But it's about the same number of houses as there are now.

JJ: How many would you say that is?

BB: A dozen or so.

JJ: Are there people living down there now?

BB: Yes.

JJ: And in the [19]40s, were those residences, were they beach houses or were they peoples' permanent residence?

BB: They were both. Mostly permanent residences. And there were some pretty large homes there. Some were taken by the tidal wave and others survived.

JJ: Did your family have a home there?

BB: Well, relatives had homes there. We had a home eventually. After the first tidal wave, we had a home in Spreckelsville, which we built up on a bit of a hill to make it sort of tidal wave proof, which was a joke because a later one caved in the front wall.

JJ: (Laughs) Okay, tell me a little more about your family before we get to the tidal wave. Who were

your mothers' parents?

BB: My mothers' parents were Henry and Gertrude Damon. Lived on O'ahu.

JJ: And do you know where they originally came from?

BB: They came from—they were born in—well, Gertrude came from Scotland and Henry was born in the islands.

JJ: Okay, and what about your dad's family? Where are they from?

BB: They're from the islands. Well, originally missionaries, so came from the East Coast and were in Lahaina. And then he was fourth generation from the missionary family.

JJ: Your dad or your grandfather?

BB: My dad.

JJ: Your dad.

BB: I'm fifth generation.

JJ: Okay, and. . .

BB: On both sides of his family he was fourth generation missionary.

JJ: Okay, and your children. Can you give me the names and ages of your kids?

BB: My boys are called Samuel and Dwight. And Samuel just made nine and Dwight is going to be eight in October.

JJ: So now let's go back a little bit to the time just before the tidal wave. And how old would you have been in 1946?

BB: I'd have been seven years old. I think I was in the first grade or second grade at Kaunoa School.

JJ: And where was that located?

BB: Right here in Spreckelsville.

JJ: Okay. Can you describe what it was like at that time, the school?

BB: Well it was just a nice little—it was sort of a semi-private school, a little private grammar school. I think they called them English standard [schools] or something. In fact Jan Priest [Wysard] would know much better, Jan Wysard, because her mother was one of the teachers there. But--- and I think the day of the tidal wave the back part of the school got a little wet, and the interior, the closest to the ocean portion of it, got a little bit wet but that was about all that happened there. The buildings weren't affected.

JJ: Where were you at seven o'clock in the morning on April 1, 1946?

- BB: I was probably at home getting ready to go to the school bus or something.
- JJ: So you took the bus down the hill?
- BB: I think, yes. I think we probably got down here. Maybe by that time realized that something had gone on and probably—I don't know. I don't remember what happened. But whether the buses came down that day or whether we stayed home—I think we probably came to school that day and turned around and went home or were picked up. I'm not sure. I don't remember.
- JJ: And what is the first thing you really remember about the tidal wave?
- BB: Just that it did a lot of—you know, lots of people were lost and that it did a lot of damage. I imagine it was just one big wave but it I guess it isn't like that. It's like the ocean moving inland. And, but no, we heard people in Hāna and along the coastline to Hāna were lost. And we heard that the kids who were going up in the school bus and they looked back and saw the Ke'ānae Peninsula covered with water or something like that. But that's about all.
- JJ: Did you see any of the damage done in Spreckelsville after the tidal wave?
- BB: Yes.
- JJ: Could you describe that to us?
- BB: I remember seeing one home which I think is Colin Cameron's family's home now. And I remember seeing the floor was all warped, all bowed—wavy floor, if you will. It had been warped because the water had gone on the first floor and wet all the wood, and it just warped. And I guess the tidal that hit our home, I saw the front wall caved in. That's about all. All the furniture was upside down inside the house.
- JJ: Was that the 1960 wave?
- BB: No, I think it was more like in the early [19]50s.
- JJ: Fifties, there was one at '57 and I think also in. . . .
- BB: No, wasn't '57, was before that. Remember we all went down—we heard it was coming—we all went down the ocean to watch it. And I expected to see a lot of fish flopping around the sand, which I'd heard had happened in the first tidal—in the '46 wave. And all we saw was maybe the level water went down maybe a foot or two. And then it didn't come in that much. And we didn't think our home would even be affected in Spreckelsville. We were out past Ho'okipa watching it, or around Ho'okipa watching the water recede, if you will, before the wave. And it got a little shallower but I was kind of disappointed it didn't get very shallow at all. Could barely tell. And then you could see the water moving in and the waves breaking over the reef a little bit. And we didn't think anything would have happened to our beach house but we went down there and the front was caved in on it.
- JJ: Can you kind of describe what it looked like?
- BB: No, just the beach house was standing but the front wall had been pushed in at the bottom. Like if you had a match. It was kind of a matchbox-shaped house in the front. Just the bottom of the matchbox would be pushed in a little bit. The walls were still there, but the water had gone

through the front wall, underneath the front wall, and busted everything up inside.

JJ: Was there anybody living in the house at that time?

BB: No, we were using it as a beach home, we probably might have even been staying there. I don't know if we were staying there at that particular time, but we were using it for a beach home on the weekends.

JJ: Do you know if any other homes down there were damaged at that time?

BB: I don't think there were many damaged in that particular wave.

JJ: What about in 1946, what about the damage to Pā'ia? Do you recall seeing any of that in the town of Pā'ia?

BB: No. I never went through Pā'ia. I mean we probably went through in a bus to school later but didn't notice any damage. I don't recall any.

JJ: Is there anything else that you can think of in the area that you saw when you went back down in 1946 and saw the Spreckelsville area?

BB: Well you could see where the water had been on land, but that's about all.

JJ: Do you . . .

BB: Well, we went out—at the country club, here we often went out because the wave—we have lots of sand dunes outside of the country club, which there were a lot of remains of warriors from the battles for Maui. And a lot of bones were unearthed by the tidal wave because it tore up the sand dunes so much that there were even skulls that were showing and things like that. I never found a skull but we found plenty of Hawaiian bones from the battles, I guess, 'cause they'd just been buried in the sand or left there and eventually covered up by sand and then the tidal wave unearthed a lot of that type of thing.

JJ: And that was right here on Maui Country Club property?

BB: Right out here on the beach side. It really did a number on those sand dunes out there. I don't know if it reached the—I don't think it quite reached the country club here but it came close.

JJ: Do you know what impact it had on the community after that, if there were any changes that people made to their lives because of it?

BB: No.

JJ: Did people rebuild in Spreckelsville?

BB: Pretty much so.

JJ: Did your family rebuild?

BB: Well, actually where Sugar Cove is now, there was a Baldwin home there that was lost and it was never rebuilt. Lawrence Baldwin's home was lost. And next door F. F. Baldwin's home, only the

carpet got wet around the point. The wave just kind of came in the direct side but it didn't go around the point too well. So it was kind of interesting. So the house---one house right next to another, one was hardly touched and the other one was taken away. Just the way the wave came in.

JJ: So what would you---do have any advice to anyone who might hear a tidal wave warning? What would you suggest people do?

BB: Well, a good place to watch or head for high ground.

(Laughter)

JJ: Okay, then is there anything else that you'd like to add?

BB: Not particularly. I think the '46 wave was really classified as like a 100-year thing. I mean a big—as I understand—a big shelf collapsed in the Aleutian Islands and caused a big wave after a big earthquake or something and that's. . . . So I think I'd be very surprised if we ever see another one like that. If something that big happens again, of course, if an asteroid hits us or something we might have something else like it. But other than that, I think that I'd be very surprised to ever see anything like that again.

JJ: Okay, well, thank you very much for letting me interview you.

BB: Very interesting project for you.

JJ: Thanks.

BB: Okay, bye.

END OF INTERVIEW





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