

Tsunami Interview from Moloka'i Island

Speaker: Elizabeth Kaupu

Year of events: 1946 and 1957

Area of Island: east Molokai

Age at time of event: 17 (1946), 28 (1957)

Experience: Elizabeth Kaupu was born in Honolulu, O'ahu in 1929 and was raised on Moloka'i. She was 17 during the 1946 tsunami, and here she describes her experience during the 1957 tsunami.

[1957]

And so getting to the tidal wave of 1957, by then I was married. We still lived on the same place. My husband, William Kaupu Sr., loved to go fishing and diving and so the tidal wave of 1957, police officer John Sebas, came to the house asking for William. I told him, "William is out in the ocean, diving." And he said, "My gosh, Napua, we got to get him in. There's a tidal wave alert coming. There's a tidal wave coming."

So he ran down to the beach and ran up the beach to the Kāpeke fishpond, trying to find William. But he didn't know that we had a signal, when William would be out in the ocean and I needed him to come back in earlier, I would hoist a white flag, probably four-by-four, four-by-six, the white material tied to a bamboo and I would wave that until William saw it and he would come in. But this can only happen in the front of the house or anywhere where he could see our home, our land. But William while out there felt the water, there was something wrong, something that wasn't right with the ocean, the water. So he decided that he should come back in and so when I hoisted the flag for him to come in, he knew that there was something wrong and he hurriedly came back into land.

He told me he felt like the water was boiling. It was getting warm and he never experienced anything like that before. So he knew that there was something not right. Even the fish seemed to go crazy—they didn't know what to do. A lot of them were going into the coral and coming out again—they were just going crazy, which he never saw before. But it was an experience for him.

Anyway, the reaction of that tidal wave wasn't the same like the one in '46. It did not come back in, or I should say, it didn't recede that much, it didn't come back in all the way, almost to where our house was. See here, we were just about maybe thirty feet or less away from the beach. But the house in Pāko'o, was about maybe forty-five or fifty feet in. And yet, the water never touched it, it was just the wash back. And so I saw not too much damage like the tidal wave of '46. And of course, I had my five or six children by then and so I didn't go running crazy like I did in the first tidal wave, running down the beach and going picking up whatever it was brought in. But you know, I don't wish for another tidal wave, because I'm really just too close to the ocean now and my experience with the tidal wave that I've been in. It could have been really dangerous, the 1946 tidal wave and me running out into

the ocean, because it was just dry land, it was just like land when that water went out and receded.