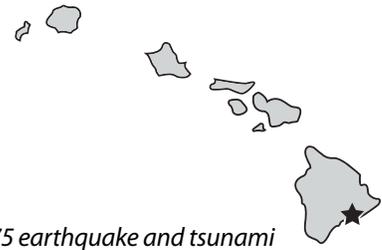


## TSUNAMI INTERVIEW FROM HAWAI'I ISLAND



**Speaker:** Jack Straka

**Year of event:** 1975

**Location:** Halapē, Hawai'i

**Age at time of event:** young adult

**Experience:** Jack Straka was part of the Sierra Club group at Halapē during the 1975 earthquake and tsunami

*Oh yah, yah, uh we were planning on a, I think three nights, four days type of thing. For somebody who hasn't been down there in that particular part of the island it's hot. You got a lot of sun reflection from the lava rocks or heat thrown up I should say, from the lava rocks. Which kind of makes it worse, you got a number of places that are steep going down and coming back up again. We went down Hilina Pali trail...and, when we got down there I was, it was probably the middle of the afternoon, and I was totally wiped out by then. And...I just kind of floated around the lagoon to recover, and then we had set up camp in the coconut grove. And there were Boy Scouts, and there was some fisherman down there...And I think there were some other people down there too, on their own.*

*Then late at night, I don't remember the exact times, there was a real bad earthquake. Actually what was scary about that one, besides the severity of the earthquake, was the cliff in back of the camp ground, that Pu'u Kapu Kapu. It started an avalanche during the earthquakes. You got all of these big boulders bouncing down, and coming across the lower part there. It looked like they were going to come in to the campground, but they never got close.*

*Then later on, I guess it was early in the morning, the second earthquake hit. And that one was worse than the first one, you couldn't even stand up with that one, you had to sit down. You couldn't possibly stand unless you were holding on to a tree. And right after the earth stopped shaking, I happened to be looking out towards Punalu'u, and you could see a lot of blue flashes in the sky. And I just assumed that was power lines snapping, but from what I understand later on reading reports in the newspaper, when you get severe earthquakes you get these blue flashes that occur which has nothing to do with power lines.*

[Scientist comment: In some parts of the world, earthquakes are often accompanied by ball lightning, stroke lightning and sheet lightning. The only causal connection that seems possible is that the seismic strains of the earthquake somehow cause an electric field in the air, which in turn produces lightning. The exact mechanism of this "seismoelectric effect" remains unknown.]

*And then kind of right after that, a large swell of water came in. And we were all kind of camping in the same area. The father and son took off running to get away from the wave. And then the other guy did the same thing. This other fellow and myself, since I can't run, I grabbed ahold of a coconut tree. And this other guy, instead of getting his own coconut tree, he wrapped his arms around me and the coconut tree, so we couldn't shimmy up. I had intentions to try and shimmy up the coconut tree to get above the height of the wave. And uh that never even happened, then the wave came in. And, actually it wasn't a wave that you would normally see you know when you're looking out in the ocean, this was just like a high swell that came in. And it came in and got up as high as we were and just washed, washed us away from the tree. Couldn't hold on to it. And after that it was just being tumbled around all over the place. I seem to remember coming up at least once maybe twice for a breath of air. But I had no idea, you know, where I was at and how far we were getting washed inland. And when I did finally surface, I recognized that I was in the crack that's between the campground and Pu'u Kapu Kapu. I don't know what the exact distance was. Had quite a bit of water in it this time, wasn't filled up, but had quite a bit of water in there. And so I ended up just laying on the surface of the water cause I was just totally beat up from fighting the water.*

*The, the crack was like a sharp drop-off on the campground side but on the other side it was kind of a steep gravelly slope. I saw some of the Boy Scouts running by. I had no idea where they were going. And when I got enough energy back to call, I was calling for members of our group. And a, the guy, surprising thing is that the fellow that was holding on to me, he ended up way down the crack somehow, which I could never figure out. The other, the other guy was right close by and the father and son were right close by. The boy never got washed in to the crack, he kind of bobbed around like a cork and stayed on top and didn't get washed in there. And I'm going to make a guess that depth that you had to climb out from the crack might have been you know maybe 8 feet, 10 feet something like. And I looked around on how I was gonna get out of there. I couldn't really see how I was going to make that climb up there. But the other option was to go up that gravelly slope. When I tried that I kept sliding back down and couldn't make any headway there. And I remember*

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*like swimming past the Keawe tree. I don't know if I ended up in the crack there or was already there to start with. But I got scratched up pretty good getting through that until I found a place where I could actually crawl up that side of the crack. Eventually got out we were sitting around huddling the rest of the morning, kind of back-to-back keeping warm cause everybody was sleeping in their swimming trunks or shorts type of thing.*

*Yah, we tried to get the, the fifth guy to come back up to us. But he didn't want to do it because one of the hike leaders from the Boy Scouts, he got washed in to the crack and really got beat up. And so he was staying with him, to help him any way he could.*

*And then it got light and a small single engine airplane came flying over the cliff and started a circle around the campground looking at the devastation there. And then from where all the survivors were saw it and were waving at the plane. So he kind of wobbled his wings that he recognized that you know people were in trouble. Then right after that two army helicopters from up at the Pohaku Loa, or maybe they were even at KMC, I'm not sure. But they came flying over the cliff too, but they went the opposite direction towards Punalu'u. So the plane, I don't know if he had a radio or not but any case he went after the helicopters and got them to turn around and come back. And they landed and start picking up what might have been the worst of the people and transporting them uh directly to the hospital or maybe up to KMC and have people pick them up there. I myself was in the second load and I got taken to the hospital. Pretty well beat up, ended up with a big puka in one ankle and a lot of scratches and bruises. Was in the hospital for three days recuperating. Nothing serious other than totally worn out. At that time we didn't know, in a matter of fact I was expecting to see a lot of dead bodies around. Cause it was it was a pretty severe. Of course we lost all our clothes and slippers and stuff.*

*Uh, then later on I heard that Dr. Mitchell, the surgeon in Hilo, he was with the Boy Scouts. He ended up in the crack. He got buried in the silt. And they found him with his feet sticking out of the mud and the silt kind of thing. And a fisherman, from what I understand, got killed too and I don't think they ever found him. I think they figure he got washed out to the ocean. ■*