

## **FROM THE ISLAND OF MOLOKA‘I DESCRIPTIONS OF TSUNAMI WAVES AND OTHER PHENOMENA**

Eyewitnesses from Moloka‘i describe tsunami waves as “a strange-looking tide,” “a wall of water,” “a wild rush of water,” “a surge of waves after waves,” “as tall as one ironwood tree” (50-60 feet tall), and as “a maelstrom of a big waves, and washing-machine-like conditions.”

In two accounts, witnesses observed strange animal behavior: bleating goats alerted their owners that something strange was happening, and in the ocean, fish moved erratically.

Unusual atmospheric lights thought to be associated with earthquakes have been observed during tsunami events, but little is known about them. A strange trail of lights during one event made a witness a believer in the legendary *menehune* with their lit *kukui lamps* warning them of danger.

### **Sam Kalilikane, 1946 Tsunami**

Sam Kalilikane was eight years old and out fishing with his father near a harbor in Moloka‘i when the April 1, 1946 tsunami occurred. His father explained the strange behavior of the ocean in Hawaiian as *kaimimiki*, which is a word for tsunami. *Kai* means ocean and *mimiki* describes the water as roiling or boiling. In his account, Sam Kalilikane describes how the waves looked. He said, “*When I seen them big waves I said, ‘Oh, my.’ That’s the first time in my life I ever see waves like that. So big and long. Real long and that thing just rolling, rolling. Was spooky, man.*” He also describes a change to how the land was used before and after the tsunami: a large taro patch in Hālawa Valley on the windward side of the island was no longer cultivated due to damage from the tsunami—very large boulders were deposited there.

### **Elizabeth Kaupu, 1957 Tsunami**

Elizabeth Kaupu’s husband was out in the ocean when she signaled him to come home during the 1957 tsunami. She shared his observations of how the fish were behaving. She said, “*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.*”

### **Sandy Schaffer, 1964 Tsunami**

Sandy Schaffer was camping on the beach when the 1964 tsunami occurred, and he and other campers survived by forming a human chain to cross a river, “just a raging torrent of water coming out,” and then moving to high ground. He said, “*The thing that got me the most was we looked across at the cliffs, where the switchbacks were, and there were, there were equally spaced lights coming down from the high ridge on the switchback on two of the—chicken skin just thinking about it—on two of the upper levels, and they were all equally spaced little lights and they were there for awhile. We all commented on it. It was very, ‘Oh, the menehunes over there.’ It was just real, it was like matter of fact to the people. Then they were gone.*”

