

Tsunami was complete

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While the wind kept a 75-foot windmill churning, supplying electricity in the early days of the ranch, it frustrated the landscaping attempts of the family's full-time gardener.

Palm trees wound up battered with stripped leaves. "They didn't look good at all," Davis recalled. "The only trees (Kaiser) could put up would be ironwood, and that's hideous."

The salt air blew through the house, repeatedly rusting away all the metal fixtures, she added. The window screens also took a beating.

"We had the help, so we could do it," Davis said.

The well-to-do family could afford to deal with these difficulties, but no amount of money can stop a tidal wave.

The memory of watching the ocean smash apart her home prompted Davis to testify before the City Council last week against the Sandy Beach project.

"I lived in that area and I had an important story to tell," she said. "Nobody had thought much about (the tsunami) because it happened in 1946. Those people (the council members) are much younger."

The tsunami struck at 6:30 a.m. on April Fool's Day. Davis woke up at 5:30 a.m. to feed her 8-month-old baby and then tucked the infant into her perambulator.

"I heard a swishing kind of noise," she recalled, "but I thought it was the wind in the coconut trees. Then Alan said, 'Grab baby and run! There's a tidal wave!'"

Davis ran outside to the car with the baby while Alan, wearing only a towel, grabbed a pair of pants and the couple's 13-year-old daughter, Nancy.

By the time Alan went back to retrieve the dog, three feet of water filled most of the house.

The highway lay about 200 feet from the home, and the family drove up it toward Makapuu as the ocean washed away the road by Sandy Beach. They parked on the Lighthouse Road where they had a good view of the destruction.

"I could see our house getting smashed up," Davis said. "It was fascinating, in a way, to watch. I had always thought a tidal wave was just a huge wave. But it was this surge of water coming in, then rushing and roaring back out."

While the Davis family managed to escape quickly, their neighbor, Mrs. Walter Wix, was caught in the surge and battered against the lava rock before being rescued.

"She looked like centipedes had bitten her all over," Davis said. "She was in the hospital for quite a while."

Surviving without a scratch made losing their home and virtually all of their possessions less of a tragedy, Davis said.

"Material things aren't that important, you learn. One thing I keep missing is my photographs, my albums," she added.

A few ironies stood out in the aftermath of the destruction — like the uncracked eggs in the battered refrigerator.

"My daughter, Nancy, collected miniatures," Davis said. "Her whole room was smashed up, but all these little miniatures were fine. And I remember one lilac vase floating around — it didn't even have a chip."

Bits and pieces of their lives kept turning up on the rocky shoreline, with the Navy helping to salvage valuables with metal detectors.

"They found my flat silver in the back pastures," Davis said. "It was all there, in its case."

She found one domino next to the gate. "I thought, 'I'll never find the rest of them,' so I threw it away. The next day, someone found all the rest."

Davis managed to salvage one good laugh out of the disaster. Two days after the wave hit, she was standing by the gate when a man from Hawaiian Electric Co. drove up.

"He said, 'Mrs. Davis, I came to read the meter.' I said, 'Well, go ahead if you can find it.'"

Davis can't recall exactly how far the water surged inland during the tsunami, but the Civil Defense map shows a 2,000-foot inundation zone for the Sandy Beach area.

Her testimony about the 1946 tsunami included slides showing the extent of the destruction. But the council approved Kaiser's project, to her dismay.

"I hope residents living where we once did and around Sandy Beach never have to undergo the terrible experience I describe," Davis told the council.

wipe-out at Queen's Beach



The house before . . .



. . . and after