



# *Tsunami Soundings*

## **Tsunami of 1946**

**April 7, 1999**

---

---

In 1946, Hawaii was a place of new beginnings and great hope for the future. Food and gas rationing had ended. Barbed wire had been removed from the beaches and there were no curfews. Blackout paint was scraped off the windows. Families, reunited after the long war overseas, moved forward. Men and women got married, started families, went back to college, invested in new businesses. They were confident that their world was again safe from aggression and destruction.

On April 1, 1946, tsunami waves crossed the ocean from the north. In the early hours of the morning, these giant monsters shredded the coastlines of the Hawaiian Islands into rubble and chaos. Men, women and children disappeared forever into the waters that boiled and raged along the shores.

In Keaukaha, a residential area along the northeast coast of Hilo Town, ancient fishponds were filled with mud and debris. Homes were smashed like matchsticks and roads were washed out. Many people saved themselves by escaping inland to the navigation towers near the airport. Others scrambled up trees. Some were not so lucky and were sucked out to sea or buried in the rubble.

Twenty-five miles north of Hilo on the Laupahoehoe peninsula, children were just arriving for school. They were delighted by the fish flopping on the bare ocean floor as the water was sucked out by the tsunami waves looming on the horizon. Children scampered down to the shore to get a closer look. The waves came in with a vengeance, smashing two teachers' cottages to bits, driving two other cottages into a grove of trees. The waves

Tsunami Awareness Kit  
Resources for Educators

wrapped around the peninsula and boiled across the meadow where children were frantically running to escape. Friends and family watched helplessly from the pali above as children and adults were sucked out to sea.

Fifty-three years have passed since this horrible tragedy. Many survivors have graciously shared their stories to instruct and prepare future generations for the next giant tsunami. Perhaps by sharing their experiences, they can find comfort and closure.

On April 1, 1999, a group of Keaukaha survivors are gathering to share their common tsunami experience, meeting at the Seaside Restaurant and ending with a visit to their old home sites.

Jeanne Branch Johnston, a Keaukaha survivor, was instrumental in the creation of the Pacific Tsunami Museum five years ago, and now helps us record survivor stories statewide.

Also on April 1st, the entire student body of Laupahoehoe High and Elementary School, members of the community and third graders from Kalaniana'ole School will clean, plant, clear, and paint at Laupahoehoe Point park and hold a memorial service at the Tsunami Monument. This annual Service Project will run from 9:15am to 1:00pm.

**"What better way to honor those who lost their lives and those who survived, than to take care of this place so you can come here and be embraced by what is called the mana of this place."**

Lucille Chung, April Fool's...the Laupahoehoe Tragedy of 1946, An Oral History, 1997

The Pacific Tsunami Museum is dedicated to educating and preparing the public for the next tsunami. We cannot save beachfront homes and businesses, but we can cheat it of human life. The next tsunami survivors are here to remind us, "Let us not forget!"

To view this, and other tsunami stories from the Pacific Tsunami Museum, please visit *Tsunami Soundings* at: <http://www.tsunami.org/newsnd.htm>