

GUEST: CLYDE AIKAU 1

LSS 221 (LENGTH: 26:16)

FIRST AIR DATE: 5/12/09

Next, meet a surfing legend. He's a man who grew up in a Chinese cemetery, won big time surfing contests, sailed on the Polynesian voyaging canoe Hokulea, and saved lives as a Waimea Bay lifeguard. He's a surfing legend. He's Clyde Aikau, Eddie Aikau's younger brother.

Aloha mai kakou, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Welcome to the first edition of a special two part series of "Long Story Short." Many know of Eddie Aikau, a waterman who was the first lifeguard at Waimea Bay, a big wave surfer who was lost at sea while attempting to save the crew of the Hokulea in 1978. But in the world of surfing, his brother Clyde Aikau is also renowned. He has won at Makaha, at the old Duke event on the North Shore, and the Eddie Aikau at Waimea. The Duke Kahanamoku Foundation named him a "Waikiki surfing legend." In the Spring of 2009, Clyde is 59, and he's not slowing down. He stopped long enough to talk with me about big waves, family and living at the graveyard in Pauoa.

When we um, first had the opportunity to um, have a house in the—in the graveyard, um, the deal was that we have to clean ... clean the graveyard and cut the grass, and maintain the entire um, graveyard. And um, in 1959, we had to cut the grass with sickles it's kinda like a wooden handle so far, with a—with a—with a half-moon blade. And we had to cut five acres, all of us six kids, with the sickle, by hand. But, you know, us kids growing up, um, during—doing all of our chores, which included washing the car and doing the housework, and cleaning the graveyard, was always first. You know, if we wanted to go surfing, we had to do all of the chores first.

—when your family took the job, and the home, did they have second thoughts about um ...

Well—

—what it was, any spooky thoughts, or any thoughts about, you know, how do we properly revere this land?

... my dad um ... has always been a very spiritual person. You know. he's always had that spiritual uh ... connection with uh, things that you can't explain. And um, us kids, knowing that, you know, we felt very comfortable from the very beginning that, you know, if there was so-called spirits or so-called ghosts, um, we would be okay,

because Pops was so strong he was sitting down um, in our house, i—in—in the graveyard at night, when all of a sudden, a big wind came from up on the street, blew right through the graveyard, blew the door open, and there was a loud crying of a baby, just crying out loud. And at that moment, my father went to the um, phone and called the hospital. And they told him, How did you know your son's child just gave birth?

And there are plenty of other stories like that?

Oh; yeah—

—you're family was actually fr—from Maui originally, right?

Yes; yes. Um, I have uncles and aunties who live in Hana. If you drive by, you'll—you'll see their last name there, Aikau. So our roots actually go back to um, to Hana, where my grandfather was the sheriff of Hana.

So does that mean the family was very, very good?

—well, my uncle uh, was chief of police, and my cousins were all policemen too.

There you go.

We always uh, tried to do the right thing. But you know, we come from a family uh, that was really bred old school. You know. And from—with our family, it was um, if one of us did something wrong, all of us would get spanking. And the spanking was, bend over, drop your pants, and big belt or a big paddle would come and hit you.

Everybody got the same thing?

Everybody got the same thing. And it's amazing when I tell this story, that five brothers and one sister, we never laid one hand on each other. And of course, I was the youngest of the family. Um ... we never touched one another physically. We would say words that wasn't so nice, but we never physically touched each other. Because they way we were brought up was, you know, take care of each other, watch for each other, and that when—when someone uh, was gonna do something wrong, we'd all kinda like, you know, go to his aid and, No, no, no, don't—don't do that, 'cause it's trouble. But you know, with—with our family, you know, with—with Pops, you know, uh, just his look would really uh, really back you up about ten feet. You know, he—he didn't really have to say anything, but just his look and his—you know, his stare would just send chills uh, on—on your back.

Well, let's—you know, when people say they visited your family home in the cemetery, they say they were just uh, enveloped in aloha, and they felt accepted, and they felt a sense of belonging.

Well, you know, my—my dad, my mom, uh, we always was brought up to—you know, you—you meet people and try to be—uh, try to um ... bring them in, in the family, make them comfortable. Um, you know, if you have food, always share your food with them, you know, talk story. Uh, if you have knowledge that they can use, always—always share that. You know. And I think when people come down to the ... you know, the graveyard, which is our—our home, um, uh, it's—it's—it's the same way, although my mom and dad is not

here anymore. Uh, my sister Myra, my brother Solomon, and me, always try to keep that going for the family.

What if they came over, and you didn't have enough food? How'd you handle that?

Uh ... we'd just give them our love and aloha. You know, and—and that uh, um ... that was ... more than enough for ninety-nine percent of the people who came down. You know, we used to go to the North Shore, and my mom and dad used to always bring a lot of food, you know. And at that time, there was a lot of surfers who ... who was also from poor families, but they were great surfers, and you know, they were hungry. You know. So we had food, and we had extra food, so you know, help out.

And your family often jumped into that gray utility truck you folks used to have, and went to the North Shore all together.

Well, you know, we had this truck that was uh, encased. And uh, believe it or not, all six of us would—would fit ourselves in the back of that truck, and Mom, Pop, and my sister would be in the front, and all five brothers would be in the back. But—but it didn't matter for us, because we had all our surfboards on top of the truck, and we know that—we knew that we were going surfing. So that's all that mattered.

I've heard that when your family got together and they were singing, it was in these wonderful harmonies—

Well, you know, harmony for us was always um ... it was always important. You know, because it—it just ... it just sounds good. [chuckle] It just sounds good.

And you could do it.

I had a high pitch, and Eddie had kinda like a medium to low pitch. But uh, his expertise was playing slack key music, Hawaiian slack key. I mean, if he was alive today, he would be probably one of the great masters of slack key. Because back in um ... the mid-60s and the late 60s, he was already really, really uh, really accomplished at playing slack key music. —and my mom had a real high, high, high pitch, and Gerald, my brother, had um ... uh, his voice was higher than mine. So you had a super high pitch, and then uh, next to that, and next to that, and it all blends together. And you know, we—we used to enjoy um, you know, the luaus at the graveyard, and Pops used to make uh, Hawaiian swipe, which was called uh ... hekapu, uh, in Hawaiian. And he used to make it out of ... pineapple juice, brown sugar, yeast, put it into a wooden barrel, and have it ferment for like seventeen days.

And it was lethal.

It was—

Practically. [chuckle]

It was lethal; it was very lethal. And um, in fact, um, when—when we had luaus, Leslie, uh, everybody had their jobs, you know. Um, uh, Solomon was to go and dig the hole, and Gerald was to go find the rocks, and Eddie was to go find the uh, you know, the leaves to put in there. And ... and uh—

What did you do?

My job was to take our truck, go down to Waikiki, and go find all the girls, and come back up to the luau. So—

Which you were very good at, I heard.

That was—that was—that—that was my job. And um, you know, we—we—we—I—I used to ... bring them up to the graveyard, you know, truckloads. And uh, so we—we—you know, we used to make 'em comfortable, and give em our swipe have a nice night.

[chuckle] And I understand that if folks had to stay over because that swipe was—

Oh, boy.

--rough—

Well, you know, the stuff uh, when you drink it, it's like um ... it just feels like strawberry juice. You know. But after—after two cups, that's it, you know.

[chuckle]

You know, it—it really hits you really hard. But yeah, yeah; we—we used to take all the keys away from everybody. Um, this was, you know, thirty, forty years ago. You know, 'cause we didn't want any—anybody to get hurt. But you know, uh, we used to do crazy things, where if you fall asleep early, you get drunk and you fall asleep early, we used to pick that person up and— we used to put him in the mausoleum ...

[INDISTINCT]

—when he wakes up, we'd hear a big scream, you know. But it—it was all in fun, and he survived, and uh, you know, it—it was just fun.

So everybody was comfortable with a lot of other people around did that mean you grew up very social, and didn't maybe like to be alone that much

Well, actually, for me personally, um, I was uh, I was a very shy guy, uh, growing up. Because uh, growing up, I had a s—stuttering problem, which I do sometimes. And uh, I used to be real inhibited. You know, I used to just kinda hide, you know, because I—I—I ... I just had a real difficulty talking. You know.

How did you overcome the stutter? I guess just try to relax more, I guess.. but then I realized that even the President of the United States stutters too sometimes. I mean, may—maybe not this one, but others have. And I kinda realized that, you know ... very important people in—in—in higher places also stutter. So then I kinda think it's not all that bad, you know, and just got better. So throughout the whole high school, um, I was a real shy guy. My brother Solomon was like the clown of Roosevelt High School, ... the whole school laughing continuously. My brother Gerald was —like the handsome one, and the—and the singer. And I was kinda like the real shy guy. But in high school, um, I was into my surfing with Eddie, and that was all, you know.

So ... your whole life was dominated by water, surf.

Yes.

And music, and family.

Yes.

And you went onto higher education, as well.

Yes. I uh, g—graduated in 1973 uh, with a bachelor of arts soc—in sociology, psychology, went to uh, a couple years of law school.

Where'd you go to law school?

Uh, right here; UH. And even my grades there was pretty darn good too.

What made you decide you wouldn't finish?

... I had an opportunity to go into business, and uh ... you know, I—I took off for a while and just went to go make money. You know. 'Cause you know, we—we ... I come from a real poor family, and you know, it was difficult to find money for my family. So I just felt that, you know, I had an opportunity in business to go ba—make money, so I did that for the last twenty-five years or so

AND CLYDE AIKAU DID VERY WELL FOR THOSE 25 YEARS, OPERATING A WAIKIKI BEACH RENT A SURFBOARD, UMBRELLA, SAILBOAT CONCESSION. NOW HIS PASSION FOR THE OCEAN CONTINUES WITH HIS CURRENT BUSINESS.

[chuckle] Yeah. Yeah; I have a surf school at the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Uh, you want to learn how to ride waves, come down with Uncle Clyde. And we also have a s—s—standup paddling lessons. Uh, we do it in the um, pond at the Hilton, the newly uh, refurbished lagoon, uh, which is real safe to learn. Come down, learn that from Uncle Clyde too.

You personally, do the teaching?

Um, I—uh, uh, sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. But I train all of my guys personally. You know, the first thing to do is to, you know, just be nice to people, you know, give them the aloha, you know, the true aloha. Um ... and I just uh, recently got a—got a part-time job with the Department of Education, where I will be a uh, a person in the middle of uh, making sure that the homeless child um, gets to go into the classroom, uh, and I'm in the middle that brings the uh, homeless child and the State together, uh, making sure that he has the transportation and the—and the lunch uh, that—that he needs. And uh ...

That sounds rewarding.

Yeah. Uh, it's—it's—you know, it's real funny, because in '73, when I graduated, that's exactly what I wanted to do. You know, I—

Sociology.

I wanted to do social work, and you know, help the kids out. And you know, forty years later, uh, I'm doing that. So I'm—I'm very humbled to have the opportunity to work uh, with the homeless, um, especially at this time, where you know, people are losing jobs and everything. So I'm very humbled, and uh, I'm—I'm set to go.

You were uh, Eddie's best friend; n—not just his brother.

Yeah; me and Eddie, we did everything together. Uh, like you know, Eddie was the first lifeguard on the North Shore in 1967. We—we were the first in the water at Sunset Beach for twenty years. And we were the last to leave. And then

we'd work at the lifeguarding at the bay. And um ... we used to ride the bay on gigantic days where it was overcast, no cameras on the beach, and he—me and Eddie used to ride uh, you know, the big waves. Uh, he rode the biggest waves uh, in the world in 1967, November 19th, Wednesday. That's what I like to say it. Other people say it was a Tuesday, I say it's November 19th, a Wednesday, 1967. Because there's certain days in your life that you just don't forget, 'cause it's just so monumental. You know, things that probably won't happen again. And in 1967, I was in high school; Eddie uh ... rode the bay for the first time. And uh, it was massive, his wave is forty feet. His surfboard is twelve feet; it goes four times up the face of the wave. It's a paddle-in wave, it's not a tow-in wave. Uh, that wave was forty feet. And I've ridden ... um, almost every big wave that pulled into the North Shore since 1967, and um ... that day is still the biggest day ever ridden at Waimea Bay.

M-hm. How do you do that? —do you just get more and more comfortable with bigger, bigger, bigger waves, and at some point you're taking off on a thirty-footer?

Um ... well, you know ... a wave of that magnitude and that size only comes in maybe once in, like, five years. Like we haven't had the Eddie Aikau Quicksilver big event since 2004. And 2004, it got up to about thirty feet. And um, I want to let you know that after the first round ... I was in second place. And these guys who were surfing are really the best in the world.

Absolutely.

You know, Kelly Slater, Bruce Irons, Andy Irons, uh—

But you're—you're the—you're the oldest in the field, aren't you?

I am the absolute oldest in the field. Um, next uh, I will be riding again, and I'll be sixty years old.

And you can still handle those big waves?

Um, I caught every giant swell that pulled in um, on the North Shore this year, and felt very comfortable. Uh, but I think it's because of my son; he's fifteen years old, and he's given me um ... new excitement, new enthusiasm about riding waves. Um, I had a conversation with my son about surfing big waves. And he—he—he goes, oh, yeah, I want to surf a big wave so I can get on the front—uh, front cover of the Surfer Magazine. And I—and I kinda scolded him, because you know, riding uh, these big waves, you know, if you're—if you're gonna do that for that reason, I feel that's—that's a really wrong reason to put your life on the—on the line. You know. Um ... putting your life on the line, um ... at that extreme level should be one that you have a personal uh, personal spirit, uh, a personal thing that you want to do for yourself. And uh, trying to do it to be famous, I think, is gonna get you in trouble. Because when you get into trouble ... and it's all said and done, and you're under there, twenty, thirty feet, and there's no way to come up, no way to come up, the only way that you're going to make it through is to—is to dig deep inside, you know ... where your spirit is, and that's what is gonna pull you through. You know. When you—

when you think about, oh, man, I guess I'm—I am gonna make the front cover, but I won't be around; you know, that's uh ... not a good thing, I—I feel.

Does he have a style like yours on the waves?

—I don't think he has my style. Uh, uh ... I think when you see him surf, uh, you will see a surfer th—that is all power. Uh, he's a hundred sixty-five pounds, and fifteen years old. Uh, he's bigger than most of his buddies, and uh, he has a lot of power in his surfing. He's real fun to watch.

You're probably more fluid.

Oh, ye—yeah; I would say that. I would say that. I am a lot more fluid than he is.

M-hm.

Because uh, in their kind of surfing, uh, quickness and uh, straight-ups, and just demolishing the lip, and flying in the sky is what surfing is for them.

But you became part of the wave, I think. It was—that was—

Yeah.

—a different—

Exactly.

—way of doing it.

Exactly; exactly. Eddie and I was more part of the wave, and more flowing with the wave. Because um, you know, taking off at the bay on a big wave, uh, you need to kinda find your way down, 'cause there's a lot of chops in the face of the wave. And um ... I would like to—uh, you know, even at sixty years old, I—I still have goals that I—that I want to do. And—and you know, uh, one of my goals uh, at sixty years old, is to go over to Maui and uh, master uh, this place called ... called Peahi, or Jaws.

Right. Wow; that's—

I know; crazy, but—

It is monster.

Yeah.

And that's all tow-in.

Yeah.

Uh, can you even paddle into that wave? It—it breaks too big and too fast, doesn't it?

Uh, when the waves are fifteen to twenty feet at uh, Jaws, you ca—you—you can probably paddle in. When it hits the twenty-five to thirty feet, to forty feet, uh, I don't think you can—you can paddle in.

How do you train for these big just um, to be su—super shape, and just to waves at age sixty?

Um, I used to run in the back roads a lot. And—but my knees and my ankles really take a beating on the hard pavement. So now, I have a jogging machine, a running machine that elevates and everything. So I—I wo—work out on—work out on that about a hour a day. But I do a lot of stretches too; lot of stretches. Um ... I do a lot of biking; lot of biking. You know, I do things that aren't so hard on my body—

I notice there was a time on the North Shore, looking back decades, where surfers used to be just partiers and drinkers, and tokers. And then there came a time when people said, whoa, these waves are serious, they can really kill you; and they started getting to be—getting to be on organic diets, and really taking care of themselves. Did you go through—

Well—

—something like that?

Well, you know ... you know ... back in the 60s and the 70s, you know, um ... riding big waves, lifeguarding, saving lives, and uh ... chasing the Haole girls was in order. And um ... but then, you're—you're nineteen years old, eighteen years old, twenty years old. I mean, everybody on the North Shore used to party hard and surf hard in—in the—in the—in the daytime. But you know, now I'm sixty, and you're trying to look back on how it was then. Uh, it's incredible on how we actually pulled it off. You know. I mean, I wouldn't recommend it today. But you know, we actually pulled it off. I mean, did some crazy things at night, and rode the biggest waves in the world during the daytime. So—and looking back now, you know, I'd—uh, I don't see how we did it, but you know, it—we did it. But um, you know, as you get older, you—you—you realize uh, that you know, you need to take care of your body a lot—a lot more, if you want to continue to ride. I mean, I'm sixty years old almost, and um ... um ...

When you look around—

—I'm still riding.

—on the big waves, how many sixty-year-olds do you see? Or even fifty-year-olds.

Well, you know, for me, 'cause I'm the old dog out there, um ... you know, it's kinda sad, 'cause there's only one or two guys from the—from the old school. You know. Um ... but then, it's fun to surf with the young guys. You know, they're all gung-ho and you know, very excited about surfing. And—and uh ... you know, uh, and it's—and it's always nice that, you know, the—the young guys can come up to you and recognize who you are, and you know, Howzit, Clyde, you know, Uncle Clyde, you know. And uh, you know, it makes you feel—feel good to—to be recognized.

Clyde Aikau won the Makaha International Surfing Championship in the 60s and the Duke Surfing Championship in 1973, won the first Quicksilver Eddie Aikau Big Wave Contest in 1986 and has been named a “Waikiki surfing legend” by the Duke Kahanamoku foundation. Clyde Aikau, waterman and gentleman...still riding the big ones. On our next “Long Story Short.” Clyde returns to talk about the Hokulea, spiritual experiences and the legacy of his brother Eddie Aikau. Please join us then. For PBS Hawaii, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Ahui hou ka kou.

Video clip with production credits:

So do you believe in old school childrearing?

Ooh, boy. I uh, I tell you. You know, like I just told you, um, my son uh, fifteen years old, and um, you know, I'm not gonna uh, lie to anyone. I mean, um, it's tough. And I'm talking to a lot of the other parents—'cause he had a whole bunch of kids that they all ride Velzy Land, Rocky Point, Ehukai, Pipeline, Velzy Land, Rock—you know.

M-hm.

Every single day. And all of the other parents o—on the North Shore are having the same problems, you know. Um, you know, they—they don't listen, and you know, you gotta do your schoolwork, and you know, they get lazy, you know. And um, and um, you know, sometimes it's tough, you know. I mean, it's tough, you know. But you—not matter, you—you love 'em larger than life, you know.

GUEST: CLYDE AIKAU 2

LSS 222 (LENGTH: 26:16)

FIRST AIR DATE: 5/19/09

... I'll just kinda cruise, you know. I'll—I'll go out and probably still surf, but not catch the biggest wave that pulls through. Uh, no matter what happens, I'll—I'll be surfing all the way 'til I'm a hundred years old.

I'm Leslie Wilcox and tonight the conclusion of a special two part "Long Story Short". Our conversation with Clyde Aikau is about saving lives, sailing on the Hokulea, and the legacy of Eddie Aikau.

Aloha mai kakou, I'm Leslie Wilcox. On this edition of "Long Story Short", we continue our conversation with waterman Clyde Aikau, brother of Eddie Aikau. Clyde sends a personal message to the family of the late David Lyman, captain of the 1978 Hokulea voyage at the time Eddie was lost at sea. We'll learn more about the challenges, heartbreak and regrets of the ill-fated voyage. Clyde also talks about saving lives at Waimea bay and shares a very personal life lesson with us. We start with this thought:

Look at what you've accomplished in your life. You—you—you went on to win pretty much the same surf classics that your brother won, and here you've—then you got your degree, and you've continued to surf big waves, and operate a business. Sometimes I wonder if—if you've gotten your due.

Well, you know, I've always looked up to Eddie as um, larger than life. You know. Um, because as we were growing up, Eddie was always in the forefront.

And your older brother, right?

Yeah.

The leader.

He was—he was always the fast runner as kids, he was always fast to pick up music. Uh, he was the hardest kid to catch. Uh, in sports, he—he always had the knack to—to take it forward really quick. You know, so Eddie was the first lifeguard on the North Shore, um ... I mean, to go out to the bay, Waimea Bay, and master Waimea Bay on the first time ever; I mean, thirty, forty feet is—is—is not a easy thing to do. So I've—I looked up to Eddie. And then—and then of course, the Hokulea, you know, his um, bravery and everything. Yeah; I—you know, I have—I have no ... problem taking ... number two slot to Eddie, you know, 'cause to me ... he's just um ... you know, a hero, Hawaiian hero. You know, and I'm just fine to be ... right behind him.

One of the things that he set out to do, that you then went and did, was um, voyage on the Hokulea. Wasn't that hard for your family to let you go on, after Eddie had disappeared when he set out on the Hokulea?

Well, the 1995 voyage coming back up from Nukuhiwa uh ... for the family, it was more like a trying to close the circle kinda thing. Eddie left in um ... '78, uh, did not make it. Um, I was supposed to uh, join the Hokulea. Uh, it's not like my family uh, forced me to do it or anything; I just want make that straight. You know, I personally wanted to do it myself, because I—I believed in closing the circle, um, of a—a voyage.

And this was almost twenty years later, '95.

'95; Eddie got lost at sea in '78. So you know, um ... going down to Nukuhiwa and um ... um, sailing back up was uh, was—was okay for me. I felt very comfortable uh, being on the voyage, and training. Now, you have to train to be i—invited on this voyage, because you know, you—you need to uh, be able to um, handle the rigorous uh, um, sailing voyage, and you gotta know what to do on the Hokulea and so forth. But I felt comfortable, because I windsurf, I sail, I drive boats, I surf, you know, dive, everything, so I felt real comfortable. Uh, we were at sea for twenty-nine days, uh, coming back up from Nukuhiwa to Hawaii. It was exciting for me when it got ... heavy storms. You know, heavy storms, take the sail down, Hokulea is going up and down.

You didn't have disturbing thoughts about Eddie on that voyage?

Oh, uh ... um, no. I had—everything was great. But um, a real quick ... uh, this island that we were on was called Nukuhiwa. And it's like a—uh, it's about the size of Waikiki Beach from the Natatorium to the Hilton Hawaiian Village. And this was a place where there's only about a hundred people there. And uh, when it comes about five o'clock, it's lights out. Well, on the last night that we were there, uh, we had to go to bed and sleep, uh, uh, because we had a long voyage to go the next day. So anyway, I was sleeping, in this ten-by-ten room. I was on one side—uh, I was one side of the room, and my partner was on the—on the other side of the room. She woke up three times that night; three times that night, and she looked over to where I was sleeping. And she saw someone sitting down in a chair, leaning over me with a headband on.

Was that Eddie, looking out for you?

No doubt; no doubt.

Have you felt that before?

Um ... yes, in 1986, when I won the Eddie Aikau first Quiksilver surfing event. Waves were twenty to twenty-five feet, thirty feet, and it was breaking on a—on a—on a wind day where we had a west wind. And a west wind would—would give you kinda like a onshore uh, break of the wave. It would break here, it would break here. And it's a real scary wave to ride the bay. But I—I feel comfortable in riding on days like that. Anyway, I was paddling out for my—my heat, and as I was paddling out, there were two turtles there. And as I was coming closer and closer, these turtles popped up and looked at me, and

they—it was like ... Bradda Clyde, follow me. So I looked at these two turtles, and I followed them. And this is where everybody sits down, all five guys, and I would follow the turtles past them, and go deeper than all of them, about a hundred feet out. And as soon as I got to that point, the biggest wave of the day would just pull right in, and I'd jump right on it. And just rip it up, come all the way in, and I'd paddle out, and the turtles would be there again. And I'd follow these turtles, uh, again.

Who were the two turtles?

Um, I'm looking at it as Eddie was one of 'em, and Jose Angel, one of—one of the other big wave pioneer surfers—

Who also died—too young.

Yeah. So ... you know, like I said, our family is very spiritual, and uh, you know, it's things that you can't um, explain. But I really believe that my wind that day was um ... with the help of uh, the turtles.

Have you ever wanted to explain something about your family or your life, or the publicity about Eddie that um, you haven't had a chance to explain before?

Eddie was a very shy guy. You know. And he was mostly a guy where he would mind his own business. But um ... if it got to a point where somebody needed help for anything, he would um, always be—be the first guy there. And I just wanted to make mention that there was a—there was a lot of—a lot of blame that went around when uh, Eddie got lost at sea in '78. And a lot of the blame went onto, you—you know, the captain of the Hokulea, uh, Lyman, David Lyman. You know, David Lyman had passed away, and I went to his funeral. You know, the whole family was there, the entire Honolulu was there, and ... and uh ... and I wanted to go up and ... and express to the family that ... it wasn't David Lyman's fault that Eddie got lost at sea, and that ... because I never had a chance to sit down with David L—Lyman, and just talk story, you know, and let him know how I felt and how the family felt. And that uh ... that at his funeral, I wanted to get up there ...and tell his family, especially, um ... and ... the whole Honolulu, that it wasn't David Lyman's fault, and that I personally and—an—and the family feels the same way. And that um ... no matter what David Lyman did to Eddie, even if he tied Eddie down, uh, that wouldn't have prevented him from grabbing the surfboard and go and get help. And uh ... anyway, um, I just wanted to ... let the—uh, you know, the family know that.

Because I'm sure Captain Lyman carried that with him, even if it wasn't ... I mean, no captain wants to lose anybody on his watch.

I know; I know. And I feel bad that I didn't have a chance to express that to him when he was living. But anyway, I just wanted to let the family know that.

That's wonderful. You know, um ...it's just so hard to believe that um, a waterman with those wonderful skills can die in the water. But what could have happened to Eddie, do you think?

People forget that ... in the Molokai Channel that night, the waves were twenty to thirty feet. And you're talking twenty to thirty feet, Hawaiian, coming every direction ... every five seconds. I mean, Eddie was one of the greatest guys in the water and stuff, saved thousands of guys; but you know, um ... putting yourself in a situation like that is, I think, pretty difficult.

Do you think he knew he was going into that?

Well, you know, some people say that Eddie knew that it was gonna happen, and this and that. But ... you know, who knows? You know, I just think—you know, because Eddie was the kinda guy where he was always prepared for the worst. You know, he would take—he would go to the country, and he'd take three different sets of clothes, all the time, on a Friday night. 'Cause he never knew where he was gonna go, but wherever he was gonna go, he wanted to be prepared. And prior to him going on the voyage, he did the same thing. He did—you know, he had a letter for the family that said, Clyde gets all the boards, and this and that. You know. An—an—and a lot of people look at that as, you know, him—him knowing that he wasn't gonna come back. But it was just his nature. I like to say, Eddie's lost at sea, and he's off on some island, and got hooked up with some Polynesian girl, and has twenty kids and can't remember where he's from. That's what I like to do.

Yeah. I wonder if he might have thought, even if the odds were against him, that somebody had to try.

Well, you know, uh, it was very uh, extreme that night. I mean, they were floating in the water o—over twenty hours, there was no food, there was no communication. Um, people were going into a frozen state, 'cause it was so cold. There was women onboard—I think two ladies were onboard; uh, I'm not sure, but at least one. Uh, everybody was scared, because they were drifting outside of the airplane route or something, where uh, the planes won't be able to see 'em anymore. So everybody was frightened, and Eddie could see that. And uh ... just being the guy uh, who he was, um, went to go get help, you know. But I—I go around to different schools, and I make presentations on the Hokulea, and Eddie, and what he was all about, and I always like to say that um, you know, no matter um ... what you do, you know, uh, you might not have to give your life to save someone, but to help someone uh, in any way you can is what his life was all about, and what his spirit is all about. And also, um, no matter what you do in the ocean, let it be riding a boogie board in Waikiki, or riding the biggest wave on the North Shore, or riding Jaws, or just swimming, just—just making sure that you're comfortable in where you are, and you're enjoying the water at that moment is what is important.

The Aikau brothers certainly cut loose in the ocean but only after their lifeguarding duties were done. And what terrific lifeguards they were. During the time they worked together at Waimea bay, they had a most remarkable record.

We never lost one person in ten years, almost ten years. And in those years, we had no jet skis; we had no helicopters; we had no boats. All we had was a twelve-foot surfboard, big fins, and a—and a lifebuoy. I mean, we saved ... obviously, hundreds of people, but—but on a regular day, uh, we'd save three people that are not breathing at the same time. One day, we were in the tower, and three people—one on the right, one in the middle, and one at the rocks were all face-down.

How did you do that? How did you drag people out and do—

We—I—

You were only two of you.

I know. I—we—we—we ran, and got the first one in. I revived him. Eddie went to go for the middle one, got that one back. He pulled the other one back, I got that one back, giving him the CPR. And then we—we both went for the—for the third person. But uh, you know, the facts are that in ten years, we never lost one person. And you know, um, that's uh ... that's—that's it.

And um, there were people who went in repeatedly, after you told them not to go, right?

Well ... in 1967, 69, 70, it was the height of the war in Vietnam; Vietnam War. And Schofield was the rest and recuperation site for the Vietnam soldiers. You know. They would—they would go in Vietnam, fight, and come and have a break in Schofield. And they'd have a break for maybe a month; but guess what? They'd have to go back to Vietnam. So all of the GIs from Schofield would come to, guess where? Waimea Bay. And they'd come down like there was no tomorrow. They'd come down with five, six coolers and—and food, and all of their buddies. And—and they just wouldn't listen to us. You know, we'd tell 'em, Stay out of the water, it's dangerous; and they wouldn't listen to us. So the—so the same person, we'd actually save about three or four times.

And did you almost lose your life in the process of saving another?

As long as we had our fins, I felt like we could—we could—we could go through almost anything.

M-m.

You know, and that was our attitude. You know, as long as we had our fins. Because no matter how big the wave is, and the impact, it's only for maybe fifteen seconds or twenty seconds. And I know, and Eddie knew that he can—he can hold on for that long. And then it subsides. And by that time, you're already pulled in closer to the shoreline, uh, where it's not so, you know, turbulent. Uh, so basically for he and I, we—we knew the currents, we knew where to go, we knew where not to go. Uh, and as long as we had our fins, we felt very comfortable.

You know, um, when—when Eddie vanished, it—it seems to me—I mean, he was your best friend and your brother, and you had so much time together; uh, real quality time together in the water, at home, uh, you know. How—it must have been really hard for you not to have that person—

You know—

--who knew you so well.

In '78, when we lost Eddie ... no doubt, I was all bust up. I mean, totally bust up. I mean ... I mean, I couldn't go the North Shore for a couple years. I didn't ride any big waves for a couple years. You know, it was just—uh, everybody moved back to the graveyard. My brother Solomon was in Haleiwa, I was um ... on the outside of Haleiwa when I met your husband Jeff many years ago. We—we all left our houses on the North Shore, and moved back to the graveyard to try to stay close to the family, and try to recoup. You know, try to—try to ... try to get through it. Um ... for me, personally, what saved me ... was this sport called windsurfing. In '79, I got captivated by windsurfing. And ... at that time, windsurfing was the sport of the—of the—of the world. Uh, and I got captivated, and I totally threw my whole body, soul, spirit into windsurfing, into learning the sport, into mastering the sport, and uh, I—I literally sailed every day, for one year, and I used to follow the world's best windsurfer, Mr. Naish. Robby Naish; uh, I would chase him every day. 'Cause he was the best in the world, and—an—and I wanted to—to learn the sport. So for one whole year, I just uh, threw my whole self into windsurfing. I actually ... um ... forgot my wife, and ... you know, forgot almost everything, and just threw myself into that. And—and as I mastered the—the sport ... and then I got back into the big wave riding again, and then I went back to the North Shore. And then everything slowly was okay. But very difficult, yeah? Very difficult.

And—and you've lost other family members too, so it's—it's—you have—

Yeah.

--all these joys, and—and these losses too.

Well, you know, our family, as a lot of people know, has been through a lot of tragedies. My brother, in 1973, Gerald, uh, went to my—went to my graduation ... party, um, University of Hawaii graduate. On the way home, he got into a car crash, and um, he died. You know, obviously, I felt really terrible about that. But you know, every family goes through a lot of tragedies, and you know, you just gotta look around you at—at you know, the loved ones who are here today, especially the young ones, and just put your head down, and just forge—forge forward. You know. You just gotta shake it off some—somehow. But very difficult.

For the men in your family, there's a danger gene; and I think your son has it too.

The—the thrill of big waves.

Well, you know, he keeps telling me, Ho, Dad, I like ride big waves. But you know, the fact of the matter is ... the real money in surfing is surfing small waves. You know, small—doing all the fancy moves and the aerial um, flying in the sky trip. You know, that's the—that's where the big money is. And you know, surfing big waves, yeah, there's some money, but when you go big wave versus small waves, you know, the guys who ride the small waves um, make a lot more money. And it's—uh, you know, the risk is not as uh, high as surfing big waves. So you know, I keep telling him, Son ... y—you don't need to ride big waves, it's

okay; you know, just keep on doing what you're doing. But yes, he's—he's got that urge to—to ride some big waves. But I don't force him to go out; I just let him go at his own pace. You know, just go easy, easy.

How do you think your life's gonna play out? How long will you continue big wave—wave surfing?

I think serious big wave riding ...uh, serious big wave riding, I think another year or two. I think another year or two, and then uh ... I'll just kinda cruise, you know. I'll—I'll go out and probably still surf, but not catch the biggest wave that pulls through. Uh, no matter what happens, I'll—I'll be surfing all the way 'til I'm a hundred years old. You know, 'cause there's always Waikiki to go cruise with, and it's always fun to ride Waikiki, you know, even on a one-foot wave. You know, it's always fun just to get in the water.

Now that you have almost six decades of life behind you, any life lessons to share with people?

I think life lessons is um ... I think life lessons is ... just try to be nice to people, the best you can. You know. Uh, traffic, people screaming at you all the time; it's tough, you know. Every street you turn, there's a ... there's a road being broke up, and people yelling at you. You know, you just need to try and take a couple deep breaths, and ... just try to keep as calm as you can. Because you know, life is so short. That's ... the life lesson right there. Um ... you know, a lot of guys have a lot of macho, you know, uh, character and so forth. You know, and it's—and it's hard for a lot of people. I mean, it was hard for me. I mean, it wasn't until thirty years, that—that I reached thirty years old, that I could say to my dad, look him in the eye, Pops, I really love you. And uh, I think—I think the lesson that I want to um ... say to everybody is that ... you know, you never know when it's going to be ... your time to check out. Nobody knows that. You know. And it's really, really, really important to express the love that you have for your family, especially, and for anyone, you know, at that moment. You know. Um, because you never know what's gonna—gonna happen. I love you, Pops.

What did he say?

Uh ... what did he say. Um ... I love you too, Clyde. You know.

Times New Roman

Video clip with production credits:

We had this one fella...big big Samoan guy or Hawaiian guy or Polynesian guy came down. He was about six feet five and he comes walking down and the waves are huge. And we tell him it it will bust you up bra. It will bust you up. He jus came out of prison, you know, been in prison for twenty years, just got out. And there's nobody gonna tell this guy what to do. So he goes to the shore break. Sure enough in about two minuets, he gets nailed. He gets nailed. I mean just totally nailed. So we dove in there, brought him back up, dragged him up up the beach, and he was ok so we left him. He sat there for about two, three hours and just looked down on the sand and when he finished, he walked

up, got up, walked up to the tower and um came up and thanked us and said he was sorry.