

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Edward "Skippa'" Diaz

Edward "Skippa'" Diaz, son of Pedro and Mary Ann Kamakahonu Ka'a'a Diaz, was born in Kalihi on February 17, 1944. He is the third of seven children and brother to six *hānai* siblings.

Diaz and his family moved from Kalihi to Mayor Wright Homes in Pālama in about 1952. At Pālama Settlement he learned karate, to swim, and to play the French horn. He went camping and participated in club activities.

A 1962 graduate of Farrington High School, he earlier attended Kalihi Kai School, Likelike School, and Central Intermediate School.

In the late 1960s, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in education from Oregon State University. After a brief professional career in the Canadian Football League, Diaz began his teaching career in Marysville, Washington.

Returning to the islands in 1972, he continued teaching/coaching at Waialua High School (1972-1975), Mililani High School (1976-1980), and Farrington High School (1980-present).

Diaz and his wife, Mary Jean Krause-Diaz, maintain a busy schedule of school and community activities.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Edward "Skippa'" Diaz (SD)

Honolulu, O'ahu

April 18, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Edward "Skippa'" Diaz for the Pālama Settlement oral history project on April 15, 1998. And we're at his office at [Wallace Rider] Farrington High School. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Coach, let's start. First of all, why don't you tell me when and where you were born.

SD: Okay, I was born right in Kalihi. I think if I'm not mistaken, somewhere down in that Bannister Street area. But I was born in Kalihi, 1944. February 17.

WN: Uh huh.

SD: Lived in the area predominantly.

WN: Who were your neighbors?

SD: Other families that were living in a low-economic area. The mix was Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Portuguese. That was not equally, in essence, maybe a little bit more Filipinos than others, but the variety of cultures was really, really evident. And I think that helped, very, very, very much in our way of thinking and relating to other people in the community. So it was, you know, a positive thing.

WN: Mm hmm. Tell me something about your father.

SD: My dad? My dad [Pedro Diaz] was born in Kalihi area, too. His parents had, then, some property down here. But he lived in Kalihi, went to St. Louis High School, graduated from there in '35. And worked for Pearl Harbor [Naval Shipyard]. One of the guys fixing ships. And my mom [Mary Ann Ka'a'a] was born on Moloka'i. Ka'a'a was her last name.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

SD: And she moved to Honolulu at a young age, her family moved here. She didn't graduate from high school, but she would have graduated, I think a year after Dad, '36. But she went to school in the Kalihi area. I was born in Kalihi, at a young age we moved over to—well, eight

years later, when I was in the third grade, we moved over to Pālama area, to Mayor Wright [Homes] housing. The place opened up in [1953]. One of the first tenants to move into Pālama Settlement. And one of the biggest pluses was we were just half a block away from Pālama Settlement. That's it. The settlement, a place to go and enjoy the company of other people, eh? It was sweet.

You move into a housing, you're pretty poor off and having a place like Pālama Settlement next to us was really advantageous for young kids. That's why it really benefitted me and all my sisters and brothers. We had seven in the family, four sisters and three brothers.

WN: What number were you?

SD: I was number three. (The) oldest was Marian. And then my brother, Butchie (Ramon), and then myself. And then the other four were below me, three sisters and a brother. The three older kids, myself, my brother, Butchie (Ramon), and Marian all graduated from Farrington. And then all the others, because the district demarcation shifted, Mayor Wright housing had to go to McKinley [High School]. So all the other siblings went to McKinley [High School].

But every one of us had definite ties [to Pālama Settlement]. My oldest sister for a short while, then she graduated from high school and got married and moved to Waimānalo where she lives now. She has a homestead over there. All of us, all seven of us had great enjoyment at Pālama Settlement. All the various activities that went on over there. The young kids to the parents, and then the *kūpuna*—I mean the older people. I didn't think of it in that context, but when you look back now, you just say, "Golly." These guys, they provided a great avenue of (motivation, education, and) support.

WN: How old were you when you first started going?

SD: At Pālama?

WN: Yeah.

SD: Seven. We [had] just moved. I was seven years old when we moved from Kalihi to Pālama, and so about there. I can remember that because when I started swimming over there I was really a, what I refer to as a *bambula*, a real big guy, a big round person. You play agates with the big *bambula*.

(Laughter)

SD: That's a good *kini* to have. But when I went to Pālama, I could swim over there, so I started swimming at a young age. When I was just between seven and eight years old, I started swimming competitively.

WN: Oh yeah?

SD: For the longest time till I came to school here at Farrington when I was a tenth grader. Then I found out that they didn't weigh you and limit your weight in football, so then I played football.

(Laughter)

WN: So, when you first went to Pālama, did you know how to swim?

SD: I just started swimming. I just started learning to swim, but I picked it up real fast at Pālama. And whatever joys that I enjoyed in competition in swimming came because of the people at Pālama Settlement. Guys like Nelson Kawakami, we called him "Oak." That was a good man. O-A-K. I thought, you know, "Oak, yeah, okay, that's the name of a tree, right?" I didn't know he was an oak tree. That's the kind of guy he was. They called him Oak. Nelson Kawakami.

Another guy in there, he was a fantastic man. He helped take care of the swimming pool, a Hawaiian guy. There were the Kaho'onei brothers that I met, and I still know them, I cherish their friendship. I take their thoughts into consideration. But they were the guys, that when I was eight years old they were eighteen years old. So, they were the young bulls ruling the roost, so to speak.

You know, when you go into a community, you have your age factor and these were the older guys. And they knew the lay of the land and what to do, the rules. And when some ding-ding like me would walk in and didn't know nothing about anything, they don't give a dang. They had to give you a cuff in the head to make you pay attention. So, they were the good guys. They sort of kept you from straying and acting stupid because I was out there in left field.

WN: Backing up a little bit. Okay, you made a move, seven years old, to Mayor Wright [Homes], and you said that you were out in left field or whatever.

SD: Yeah, yeah.

WN: What kind of a kid were you?

SD: I was a *kolohe* kid. A kid that really found a lot of time to get into mischief. And I've got to attribute that partly (to) me, but partly (to) my friends. I throw it all on the burden of the friends (laughs) that really got me into the kind of problems I got into. But it was a mutual consent kind of thing. We all wanted to screw around, you know. So, we were *kolohe* in that sense. We didn't go out try to murder people. We went out and smoked cigarettes, some silly thing like that. And when we got a little older, we see the old guys drinking beer. We drank a beer. Five guys drinking beer and everybody get drunk. That kind of thing.

We were so young, but we didn't have any really good, solid support from the adult community keeping us in line. But when I went to Pālama, I got that action because I was stepping out of line so much these guys had to, "Get over there! What the hell you doing across . . .?" and all of that kind of. And I was ducking guys all over the place. But I learned that you got to pay attention. But Pālama Settlement taught me that. You got to pay attention.

WN: What kind of people were your parents?

SD: Well, they were hard working and loving. They set example kind of stuff. My dad liked to have fun like the other guys, but he worked hard. Mom was a housewife. She had seven kids and in between the seven, she *hānaied* another six. So every two years a kid come along and

between the two years and every year, I mean the other years when the kid didn't come along, she adopted one, full of family members. So, we had plenty kids in the family. When I was young, I thought, "I know we got fourteen sisters and brothers, but there were only seven of us." The ones in between were the cousins that Auntie couldn't handle, so she'd take care. Or a kid from Mayor Wright housing that wasn't being cared for and she'd take them in. Tell the family, "I'll take care of him."

So we knew from what our parents did (for) the other kids and us that they were good parents. They loved you. So that was one of the things that really got me pointed in the direction I moved into. I really liked what my parents asked me to do. I mean, I liked my parents so much. I just eventually did exactly what they told me. I get this Hawaiian stuff coming out of me now because I'm thinking of my parents. When they passed away. . . . Excuse me. Get me a napkin over here. I don't know if you ever interviewed Hawaiians. They real emotional. They crybaby sometimes. (Laughs)

WN: When did they pass away?

SD: In 1983, March, my mom passed away. In 1984, January, my dad passed away. Like a reverse-order gestation period. Nine months after Mom died, my father just gave up the ghost. He could have hung on, maybe, but he just didn't see any reason to go on. So he passed away too, of a broken heart, I think. But before they left, they gave all of us that strong feeling of family. You going do anything, you just got to do it with the family first before you take on any other human or living creature. You've got to do it for your family first. That sustained us.

And I went to school because my parents wanted me to go to school. But I'm the one benefitting from all that I did. I do guess the people around you benefit somewhat when you—in maybe not noticeable terms, but things happen.

WN: What was Mayor Wright housing like, living over there?

SD: Well, it was just like it is right now. It's a tough row to hoe. There's a lot of harsh things going on in the community. Economically, (socially), the things we lack in those areas really make life—a lot of mistakes over and over and over. So you see that a lot. But you also see people grabbing themselves by the bootstraps like that Horatio Alger kind of stuff and then stepping out of there. In the span of their own lifetime.

They go from young kid to adult and they're out. It's not the kind, "Ho, my grandkids made me." (Laughs) You know, I'm going to be stuck in this environment. That's the kind of environment I visualized when I was in there. When I was young I was just, "Well, where's my meal, man? Where's my clean clothes?" That's all I was worried about. And Mom and Dad was covering that end like a blanket. And then you grow up and you do the wrong things and if you know the difference before you're an adult then you're going to do the right thing and you ain't going to get into any problem.

But this area, I don't know why, I mean I have an idea about the reason why a lot of young kids go astray in this kind of community. Economics is a big factor. Education is another big factor, but the time spent to keep or get on line involves man hours, not money hours. That's where I see the lack. And yet within [the community], you know, when you talk fifty-fifty,

that means half-half [are supporting the kids]. But when you're talking 20 percent trying and 80 percent not doing anything, that's where the lack of support comes from, the adults in the community. It's hard for them to get it done. And if there weren't places like Pālama Settlement, that percentage would go higher still.

The guys going in a vicious circle, staying in that strata, guarantee the guys going get all kinds of problems; mentally, physically, socially, raising families. So *da kine* places like Pālama Settlement [are] for the steam to blow off and the acquisition of other ideals, like work hard, like teamwork.

My parents gave me this thing I call H.E.A.R.T., an acronym. I use it several times, I don't know if you've ever heard it, but I want to slip it in on you now. It sort of entails not only the things that my parents were pushing on us as kids, but what very, very similarly, Pālama was pushing on the kids. And I've got it right up here [SD points to his classroom blackboard], H-E-A-R-T. I've had it on this blackboard for a long time, I mean, for several years. Every beginning of the year, I talk about that and I put it up there. But it takes a word, H-E-A-R-T, is an acronym that comes from five words of which are ideals and instructors of behavior that is good.

The first letter, *H*, represents the word humility, the inculcation of humility in every person is the key. To communicate, you've got to be humble. You cannot be arrogant and communicate because that wears off, wears thin real fast. A humble person is a guy who will be "we, us, and ours," will help other guys and not want to say "*Ta-ran ta-ran*, I'm the guy who did it."

That humility stuff. Mom and Dad said, "Ey, that stuff is very important." Communication process, very main key to be humble.

Second one, [*E*], what everybody gotta get out of this life, because if not they will be staying in the dark ages, education. Very significant. We all acquire as much education as we can. And in fact, the ideal educational animal is one who will acquire learning till he dies. That process is a dynamic process till death. If by then we have a technology that can extend it then we'll live longer, but education is important, and is a must in our priority listing of life. It's your family, then your education. If you're going to have anything in front of that, you're screwed up.

A, attitude. You got to have a right attitude, positive attitude. My momma said this, "There's more than one way to skin a cat and there are many ways to achieve what you want to achieve. And if you have the right attitude, all of those things will open up for you. If you don't, if you have one bad attitude, [even if] we send you to Punahou [School], you ain't going to make it. You get one good attitude, you come Farrington, put you in a closet, you going to make it. That's the right attitude." Mom and Dad said, "That's the one you want. That's the one you've got to have." All these things; humility, education, attitude, Pālama Settlement teach the same thing. So I had a double whammy and that's why I think the stuff *wen* hang in there on me. And then essentially when I finish what I'm saying that my coaching mantras is all these things.

Okay, *R*, responsibility. You going get responsibility when you day one, clean your diaper, pick up your litter. Take on your responsibility, finish 'em, do it, be a responsible person and all the other things—if everybody be responsible for what they're doing, hey, we got no

problem. There shouldn't be anything insurmountable. But you gotta be responsible. If a kid is responsible for all his actions, he'll be a good kid, especially if he is raised right by the family, but R, you gotta be responsible.

And then T, that last one is teamwork. The world will never get any better if we don't work together as a team, a family, a community. I tell any person, if you follow that, you got it. Pālama Settlement was teaching me those things in different ways. My parents was pounding 'em in me. I always was thinking, Golly, what's the matter with them? They don't know nothing else? But that's everything right there. And then I said, "Okay, now I'm okay." Now I know that you don't have to look at too many things in life to get everything. You just gotta make sure you're morally right, you know what's going on, because when you go do something, your eyes wide open.

This guy named Kink told me that. Lorin Gill, he was an administrator [executive director, 1964-69] for Pālama Settlement. Fantastic. He was jack-of-all-trades. He did everything: drive the bus, took us camping, knew every plant. The guy was phenomenal. I look at this tree and he gave me one one-page talk about it without even blinking an eye. And I go to another stuff and he gave me the genus, he gave me the history and I go, "Wow! You've been reading something?" He no read nothing. He get 'em all in his head.

But he was the one who said, "Eh, anytime you do anything, your eye open, nobody to blame. You going in with your eyes wide open. You get out of it all you can or you can just screw up. When your eyes are closed, you can't see nothing."

(Laughter)

SD: "Have your eyes open when you make a decision." He remind me of Pālama Settlement, you know, that kind of stuff.

WN: What caused you to go to Pālama Settlement in the first place, do you remember?

SD: Play sports. Just to meet with other guys. They had a great gym, they had a great swimming pool. They had a big old field in the back. The field where the [H-1] Freeway goes by, eh, that baby [the freeway] crack that field into one-third. That was two-thirds more big old field out there because no freeway, but the freeway went through. We had a great time over there. And they still do, but in a limited space.

WN: Was the tennis court still there, across the street?

SD: When I was going, the tennis courts was across the street. In fact the whole Strong-Carter Clinic, the column building was moved closer to Strong-Carter side. The stuff was further over on the other side. And behind the front column, there was a big building on one side faced the swimming pool and the other side was a band room. I played the French horn when I went over there.

WN: Oh yeah?

SD: I had to go and do that kind of stuff. I wanted to do that, I wanted to do a few other things, but they said, "Eh, you going do music. And you do this activity." So, I was kept busy and

that's the answer. Pālama Settlement knew the answer on solving problems for kids. Adult supervision in the major areas; music, art, sports, you know, any kind. And now they get computers. That's phenomenal. But I went there because of sports and I found other things that I acquired at Pālama.

WN: How structured was it? I mean, you went there for sports, but did you have to play the French horn? Or you just chose to do it.

SD: They sort of lead you in, lead you on. You know, I wanted to play the guitar, but they didn't have it in our—it's just I had to play something else. And my fingers was big, so they gave me something that was on the bigger side. Either the tuba or the French horn.

(Laughter)

SD: I said, "Ah, I'll take the one over there." But it wasn't, "You do this," or "You do that." They get you into activities. They have plenty of them. They have camps. They had one of the best camp experiences, where Camp Erdman is now. Before there was a place called Pālama-by-the-Sea camp.

WN: Right.

SD: And that one is situated where—what is the name?—Kaiaka Bay in Hale'iwa. There's a park called Kaiaka Bay Park that used to be Pālama-by-the-Sea camp. And if you go into the park and drive in there, that son of a gun—pine trees that open up into one ocean. You know, nice bay. Kaiaka Bay, the sand, instead of having sandy area it's coral area. But it sort of walls off people from coming from that other side. It was just like one little alcove island in there. And Pālama took us out there and we spent a whole week over there.

I remember going over there when I was eight, nine years old. I was enjoying it so much, I cried when I had to come home. We were there for a two-week period. Go up into the mountains, hike. Go down the beach, swim. Play games, have campfire, all of that stuff. And because you from an economically deprived area, Pālama has always tried to keep the cost factor at zero for the kids and the families, 'cause they no can afford 'em to begin with. But they took us. And then when we were finished in two weeks, when we go back, another batch comes there. I want[ed] to stay for another two weeks, man. I wanted to stay all summer.

(Laughter)

SD: But you know, you come to that reality. You can fantasize when you young, but then you got to get a shot of reality every so often. And it's an experience, it's not a lifestyle that you can acquire if you like. We had great enjoyments. When I came back from the Mainland [in 1972], I wanted to go to the place that was in my mind when I come home, is go back out to Waialua. I went back, I moved to Waialua. I lived there for twenty-three years.

WN: Really?

SD: Yeah, from 1972 to 1995. And now I'm living—I'm trying to find a place right here in Kalihi, right up here, right in Pālama area, and then live in the community. I feel that stuff that the Pālama experience gave me was to come in the community and help, eh? And so that's what

I'm doing. And now that I *bin* talk to my guys to go do something else [i.e., activities outside the school], they making like, "Oh, what should I do?" I like do what I *wen* learn from Pālama. You know, community service, help out. And an okay stuff. If I never have my teaching job, I'd be up a creek. Can't live on fifty-cents-an-hour job, when you doing like coaching, like that. And I derive great pleasure from that, but I also know that I *wen* gain that ability to coach, or want to coach, from my experience at Pālama. So, big tie-in. Phenomenal tie-in.

And I see a tremendous worth for things that Pālama does for kids from housing areas. And I hope—you know, Susannah Wesley [Community Center], the theory and stuff just like Pālama on a smaller scale. They got a big recreation center up at KPT [Kūhiō Park Terrace]. But they're all coming off the things that have been going on at Pālama, other people are acquiring. Of course, when you look back at the history of Pālama Settlement, it's based on the system that was developed by Jane Addams [founder of Hull-House in Chicago]. You know, the earlier social workers and they wanted to make a better place for the economically deprived people.

WN: Mm hmm.

SD: And it's a good, good thing. And it can help and it does help. And I'm an example of it and I take pride in that.

WN: You do.

SD: Just like I take pride in coming from Farrington. I mean, when you get one guy from—even like you, your perception, unless you've dug into it, your perception would be very similar to what majority of the people who perceive Kalihi, Pālama, and Farrington as being a place you don't want to go to because they get bad stuff going on. I'm here to tell you there's good stuff going over there. I mean, you come in the classroom, these are the banana kids, but they respond well given the stuff that all educators know: smaller group, more learning. Get rid of the class size. That's how it is.

At Pālama, I don't know where they come from, but they used to find a lot of volunteers to help here and help there. And every year, you get different people there, but they doing the same thing. And where they coming from? Not out of the sky. It's a good, good development by the people in the directorship and the help that comes through community settlements, like Pālama Settlement. I see nothing but great value. But, I also see what they are trying to do. They're bringing the cultural themes out of the people and putting it in a positive light to make sure that they feel good about themselves. Because if you don't feel good about yourself, you ain't going nowhere. A piss poor attitude will keep you in a hole all the rest of your life.

WN: What kind of things did they do to improve your attitude, make you more aware of your heritage, cultural heritage?

SD: Hard work in sports, made me work hard. It really challenged me in the classroom. We used to have skull sessions, they may not know of it now. But we used to sit, like a rap session. You know, you talking about bona fide, substantiated information in history books and giving us that extra help in there to pick up on it. And I think that when they show you that kind of stuff and you earnestly try to acquire it, it happens. And then they were doing organized

activities, I like that. I didn't like it then. But I was *kolohe*.

(Laughter)

SD: But I was brought to light on how it's supposed to be. Maybe in the long run it would be a better way to do it. (Laughs)

WN: Did your parents tell you to go?

SD: Oh yeah, because I was *kolohe*.

WN: Yeah.

SD: But then they were there, too. She'd feel comfortable and you want to please them, so you do 'em. And before you know it, you like doing 'em and it just worked out real well. I'm not being that "me, myself and I" kind of thing, but I have friends, and myself including in the group, we supposed to be graduating from "University of Dillingham" [i.e., O'ahu Community Correctional Center] down the road here. And plenty guys in Pālama were like that. The Kaho'onei brothers was like that, but they upstanding citizens now and they living in Wai'anae. Their sons did good. Their family members did good. It's where the ontogeny recapitulates progeny. You ever heard of that? Never heard of that? (Laughs) It's about the progeny being the parents . . .

WN: Right.

SD: . . . and ontogeny being the child. Anyway, you are what your parents were.

WN: Full circle, yeah?

SD: Yeah. And then if that progeny's got the right vibes, ontogeny going pick up the right vibes. But I got a lot of adult supervision. And it wasn't *da kine* stern kind. Lorin Gill was the master negotiator. He'd talk, talk, talk till you blue in the face. And then you had the stern guys, like Oak [i.e., Nelson Kawakami]. Oak was a stern guy. But I had great adult supervision. Adult role models that I would latch on to. And any place that's concerned about kids, we sure had that kind of development. So, the kid pick up on that. Only going pick 'em up through the eyes.

WN: What school did you go to, elementary?

SD: Likelike [Elementary School], well actually I went to Kalihi Kai [Elementary School].

WN: Kalihi Kai. Mm hmm.

SD: And then when my parents moved over—when we moved to Pālama, I went to Likelike.

WN: So how would you compare school with Pālama Settlement? Apples and oranges or what?

SD: Well, I tell you, it was more the size factor was better because the groups were smaller [at Pālama Settlement]. And that I realize now. It was very similar to an educational environment, very similar. But they [Pālama Settlement] give you a variety of things. They shoot at you a variety of things. Health things. I went to the dentist for ten cents [at] Strong-Carter [Clinic].

And then I was in a club. A club called the Blackhawks and we did social activities. I was on the swimming team. I was in the band. You know, all *da kine* activities. The time when you up and at Pālama Settlement, they have things for you to do. And even if you like just cruise, they got pool tables or the Ping-Pong tables and it's well kept. Anyway, that's the kind of stuff.

WN: You enjoyed Pālama more than school?

SD: Well, yeah, sometimes because they had the taskmasters in the school. But then I had to do something from out of that too because I had a coach who said, "I don't care if you Jim Brown for Chicago or whoever you are. But if you don't go school, you ain't going play."

I go, "What?" Then I went to school and I figured it out and so it helped.

I mean, I had a guy there, who telling, "This and this is what we gotta do."

And then another guy say to me, "*Bruddah*, you a good football player. Come we go take care of you."

Had a guy tellin' me, "Get to class on time." And that part was good, too. But that's what Pālama guys were doing. They was in there for the kid. They were in there for me. I never know that. I thought they was there because shit, they never had nothing else to do.

(Laughter)

SD: But they had a reason. I said, "Oh, okay." Later on in life, I'd seen that reason. And that's why I value the time I *wen* spend there more. There's a little rhyme to my madness. There's a little thought process going through. I'm not doing this because I'm a crazy guy. And then you see the light, too. A lot of the things I learn when I was young at Pālama, I use the techniques. I just set the expectation high, give the rules, tell them, "There's the line, *Bruddah*. Don't come on this side too far." I get about fifteen strategies that I use in education, sometimes like this, sometimes like that. But there's a strategy called a law-of-the-jungle strategy. And for young kids, at some time, you gotta use that one, you know. Parents get a hard time doing 'em, because you see 'em every day and you know, some of the threats they do.

WN: Yeah.

SD: But then you get some, they just pound the shit out of 'em. Boy, they become hard-nosed criminals, man, them guys do. But you get the strategies. I mean, I don't go around beating them on the head every day, but I make sure they feel the jolt if I shake their hand [hard] and I go, (SD makes crunching sound) "How you doing?"

They go, "Oh, okay." And the mind process tell 'em. "Eh, wait a minute. I better not fool around with this guy."

And then you tell 'em, "Hey, do this." Then they do 'em. It moves better. Sometimes you just gotta talk to 'em. But I will not throw away this idea of you spoil the child, you know that kind of stuff. I say if the kid needs a scolding, he going get 'em. (WN chuckles.) And I got some scolding at Pālama, too, man. Hoo.

(Laughter)

WN: You said that you got into swimming, yeah?

SD: Yeah.

WN: Why swimming? Was it because the program was good?

SD: Oh, the program was fantastic. In fact, the majority of the programs over there were fantastic. But, the swimming part was one of the avenues I could participate in. And it was an area that they didn't weigh you. I was a big guy. I still am. I was about 200 pounds when I was in the third grade. You could only be 120 pounds to play the football game.

WN: For Pālama?

SD: For Pālama. For anybody. Even the Pop Warner, they limit your size. They don't want nobody falling and killing somebody else. So, they said, "Hey, Diaz." I couldn't even---they had a thing called barrel weight, 150 pounds. You know, 150-pound limit guys. And these were older people, you know, they formed barefoot league. I couldn't even get into that one. I was only ten years old, you know what I mean?

(Laughter)

SD: Nine years old and the guy says, "*Bruddah*, you overweight. You fifty pounds over the men's [weight limit]."

(Laughter)

SD: And then they said, "Eh, you know, sometime you look like a floater. Why you no go swim?" And then swimming I found out very quickly through Harry Mamizuka, the guy who was our swimming coach, very influential in my life. And he says, "Eh, there's two kinds of swimmers."

I said, "Yeah?"

He says, "One that sinks and one that floats. And the good swimmers are the floaters." He says, "You are a floater."

(Laughter)

SD: I go in the water, I just stay on the top, eh. He said, "All you gotta do, you go like that." (SD

makes splashing sound.) He said, "You'll be a good swimmer. Come on, come in the swimming pool, we go swim." And then I was a floater. I still am a floater. In fact, I swim now with my wife. When she gets tired, she says, "I go climb on my island." She jumps on my back.

(Laughter)

SD: "I rest here."

"Okay."

We go a few yards and then she said, "Okay, I going swim now."

I said, "You lucky you get your own personal island, ah, you?"

(Laughter)

SD: That's why Pālama Settlement is when I . . .

WN: How fast were you?

SD: Oh, I was---well, (pause) okay, I was pretty little bit fast. (WN chuckles.) I concentrate. I do concentrate on what I do. So, I practiced very religiously. But we had fast guys. We had guys like Jeffrey Yamashita, Mike Harada, oh, some good guys. Both of them, them guys, they come from hard kind communities. Jeffrey Yamashita was [a homicide detective] for the [Honolulu] Police Department. And he retired. Now he's working with Keith Kaneshiro in [the state Department of] Public Safety.

WN: We interviewed him for this project.

SD: Oh, you did?

WN: Yeah.

SD: Oh, fantastic. Jeff, out of sight, man. See, Jeff was a little older than me. But we all competing, too. And we copied each other, or I copied them. Mike and Jeff and a guy named Randy Chun. Randy was a good swimmer, too. But then Randy went into canoe paddling and surfing and became a very well-known surfer. And a guy named Ben Aipa. Ben Aipa also swam and he was a great diver. Oh, good swimmer, good diver. And later on in his life, later on in [his] middle twenties, I think, early twenties, he started surfing. He became one of the best known world champion surfers, Ben Aipa. Good swimmer at Pālama Settlement. But that's how, all the guys I swam against. But in my age group, I was, you know, okay.

In fact, there was one incident where Harry Mamizuka—you know the Pavlov theory about conditioning reflexes? And about competing when you're hungry as opposed to competing when you're full? (Laughs) Well, this guy knew I love food. So, he gives me a challenge. He says, "I'll challenge you, Skip." And he was smart. He hit my button right off. He says, "I tell you what. There's a place in Waikīkī called Waikīkī Sands. It's a buffet place, you know, *Bruddah*."

WN: I remember that.

SD: He gave me this initiative. He said, "You know what, Skip? I going put you in this race, the 100-meter freestyle. And you going be racing against this guy who's a national champion. He made the national record. And he's in that race. Skippa', I think you pretty fast, but you beat this guy, I take you Waikīkī Sands, all-you-can-eat, for two days."

I go, "Ha, that's a good one. I take the bet." I went out, I *wen* swim, I went *bzzzz*, [i.e., zipped past opponent]. I beat the guy. You know Waikīkī Natatorium? It's a long course. You know, 100-meter. I zap 'em. I catch 'em by about 1½ body length. Free meal, *Bruddah*. Voom, voom, voom, voom! I went flying! (WN laughs.) And the next day, after that day, they canceled out the long course and they went with 50-meter. So, eleven and twelve [year old age group], I had one national record for the 100. (Chuckles) That guy *wen* push my button, tell me food. I go, "Huh? Food? I'm going for the food." And then he used that every time afterward. When we were going to the Junior Olympics swimming meet, he says, "Skip, 50 meters, bet?"

"Ooh, we on." (WN laughs.) Shit, I was collecting bets from all over the place. That's why I never lose weight.

(Laughter)

SD: But yeah, I had good fun swimming. Butterfly was my dominant stroke . . .

WN: Oh, yeah?

SD: . . . and freestyle. Butterfly and freestyle. So, because of that he made me do the individual medley where you go the four strokes: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle. The breaststroke wasn't too slick, but I had my butterfly, free and then the backstroke is okay too.

WN: Mm hmm.

SD: But till today, I've acquired a learning—lifetime activity in swimming from Pālama Settlement.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So swimming was your thing. What else did you do?

SD: Well, I went into this thing called *kaju kempo karate*. And I participated in that because that was at Pālama Settlement, too. Right next to the swimming pool. So, when I finished swimming, I went into the *karate* class.

WN: Who was the teacher?

SD: Sonny Emporado was his name.

WN: Uh huh.

SD: Sonny Emporado. Just because I was pretty ornery too once in a while. So, the guy who was the instructor said, "Eh, boy," 'cause he watch me swimming, eh? And I since I big, I little bit boisterous, eh? "Hey you, come over here."

And I go, "Yeah, you sure?" I was acting stupid. So, I went in there and I *wen* learn how to be real humble.

(Laughter)

SD: 'Cause he *wen* knock the shit out of me. And they show you the different techniques and stuff. But they give you serenity and you feel confident about yourself. And when you get all the way over there then you see he just being one nice guy. That's how it is. I learned that one. That's Pālama Settlement, too.

Then when I could participate [in other sports] when I got to the tenth grade here then I stopped swimming. I went swimming with them [Farrington High School] but then I went into track. I did football and swimming which is a hard sport and a soft sport where your muscles gotta be more relaxed in one thing, and [then] to run back and forth, it really makes it a little hard for an athlete to do a sport like rugby or football and then turn around and do swimming. Because the suppleness of the physique, yeah? But I went into football and went into track. Football in the fall, swimming was in the spring, but track was in the spring, too.

So in our swimming pool, you go on the far end of the swimming pool, you can look down on the track field. And the track coach was the football coach. And then he said, "Skip, what are you doing swimming up there? Get down here and throw the shot put."

"You sure?"

He said, "Yeah." So, I went and I did track and I passed up swimming. And I just went and did the shot put and discus, because it matched up better, the track and the football, came in better that way. But I've always enjoyed swimming. My last competition over here was at Farrington. And then the coach, Tom Nekota, who was a real good coach here, he got the pipeline, see? His pipeline was connected right at Pālama Settlement. And all the good guys, all the good swimmers came to Farrington and that's how he got a good swimming team. We had a great swimming team over here when I was in the intermediate and in high school and then afterwards. By the middle [19]60s, or when Tom Nekota left the swimming program is when we really. . . . You gotta have one strong individual in that specific sport to keep it going, yeah?

We have two guys here. And both of them from Kalihi. And Harry Pacarro, he went to Pālama Settlement, but at an intermediate age Harry went to Punahou [School] from Kalihi. He was the only Pacarro that went to a private school. And then he finished private school, he come over here. He been teaching at Farrington for thirty-six years. I said, "You shouldn't

have left.”

(Laughter)

WN: How do they keep track of your academics?

SD: Not as well as they do now. But they just kept on telling you. And just by virtue of you being there a lot, they get things out of you. And they may coordinate with the counselors from the school that you go to. Likelike [Elementary School] or for me it was Central Intermediate [School]. 'Cause I was swimming when I was at Central [Intermediate School] for Pālama [Settlement] and Harry [Mamizuka] demanded, you know, passing grades. But back then, the leniency on passing was D. Now it's, hey you know it's still D, so long [as] you don't get the F, but you got to compensate one D with one B, to come out with a C. But they're moving in that direction.

Their concern was that you acquired education at the levels you are. And they don't throw the big burden of expectation, but they figure by involving themselves with the youth on a day-to-day basis you going change 'em. You guarantee. That's why I'm doing it. I know I going change the fifty, sixty kids I'm working with because they see my face every day, nine months out of the year.

You know, you don't change a person's behavior by just calling them up on the phone and tell, "How you?" You gotta be one-on-one, man. And I had plenty of that from that side and I do plenty of that now.

WN: I'm wondering at Pālama Settlement when you were going, did a lot of kids fall through the cracks?

SD: Yeah, yeah. There's a percentage and it's sad that it's maybe as big as it is, you know. They started off with two strikes. So, by the time they get there—unless you get to the whole unit, with the family unit, and you get that give and take from there, the kids fall through the crack. And some of them are still in the crack. And they just don't take advantage. Maybe it's because of the communication or whatever it is, they don't know and seek help. But that's a human frailty already, eh. You got guys doing that all the time all over the world whether they have the wherewithal or not. They screw up.

WN: That's why I'm trying to think, your background, you know, you were *kolohe*. You came from a tough part of town. You had friends, some good, some not so good. But yet you were able to come to Pālama and really take advantage of the programs and you still take advantage while you're teaching and so forth.

SD: Oh yeah.

WN: And I'm just wondering was it you? Is it something about your background that enabled you or gave you the ability to take in all of this positive stuff that Pālama offered? Or was it Pālama itself?

SD: Well, I tell you the entity had to be there for the individual to acquire. It's an outside-of-the-body kind of thing. So, both of them, the meeting of two things, eh? One who is receptive and

one who has it, the knowledge, the base, the acquisition and then it happens. But you gotta have—that third segment, has gotta be the family unit. If you don't get positive feed from the family unit in some form or another, chances of running into a knowledgeable base of social betterment like Pālama—you're not going to fall into that situation.

But I'm of the belief that one kid is one kid and the kids are good before they get bad. Just like you're ignorant before you get stupid. The information is being provided for you and you have no physical handicap or disability, you acquire it and when you do and you throw it away and not use it, then you're stupid. But if you never got it yet, then you trying and you make mistakes, that's ignorance in doing that.

And I think you gotta check off a few percent of guys who still go left when everybody going right. Or they go down the stairwell when everybody going up. And that kind stuff—the more old I get, the more I find out it's a reality you gotta deal with and you just gotta catch more guys than you don't catch. But it's gotta be moving towards people. The ideals that the settlement have, they gotta go seek out, not to destroy, but seek and recover. And if that guy floating out there wants it, (SD snaps his fingers) you got the magnet.

So, it's something that gotta be (SD claps) bubbling up like one artesian well and somebody's walking by thirsty and says, "Oh, I like drink." And then they going try. Then it connects.

WN: Mm hmm.

SD: And God knows when you hit the desert, you going get the oasis. And Pālama is an oasis for the very sensitive minds and hearts of young kids. And then for older guys. For health reasons. For social reasons. For cultural reasons. For athletic reasons. Sure, they covered it. And they're doing a good job. And here you gotta have a combination. It's a combination thing. Things not going happen until you gravitate to it. And so I think both ends are necessary for it to happen.

WN: How did you get your name "Skippa?" How did you get that?

SD: Ha, that's a good one. Uncle Sam Lukela. He was an *aku* fisherman from Portlock before [Henry J.] Kaiser got over [i.e., developed] there. They had one piece of property over there and we used to take his boat out. When we used to visit him, I used to always want to get on the boat and ride the boat. And one time, we was riding it and my older sister, either that or was my—no, was my older sister, my mom didn't like going in the water. My older sister was the one who heard Uncle Sam, we was riding on the boat by the wheel and he said, "I am the skippa' of the sea." And with pidgin English, it's "skippa'." "I am the skippa' of the sea. You will be the skippa' of the land."

(Laughter)

SD: I don't know what it was. I was a small kid then. But I got that name "Skippa'" and it just stuck.

WN: (Chuckles) Your real name is Edward, eh?

SD: Edward, yeah.

WN: So what did they call you when you were a kid? Skippa'?

SD: Skippa'.

WN: At Pālama too?

SD: Skippa'. Like today when they call me Edward, I don't know who they talking about.

(Laughter)

SD: Unless, you know, I'm tuned in. Because I respond more to Coach or Skippa'.

And I used to try correct guys. I used to have this English standard concept that if you're gonna say the word, you say it correctly. And they was calling me Skippy and Skipper. So I had joke for that. And I tell 'em, "Eh, I don't look like peanut butter and I don't look like dog food. (WN laughs.) I got an *a* on the end and it's pronounced Skippa'." I had tell it to a zillion guys yesterday.

(Laughter)

SD: Please don't call me late for dinner. I know I can't handle that. People [I know] call me by, "Eh, Skippa'," from when I was in high school. But over the years, too, get other guys. Most guys if they don't know, they calling me "Skippy." "Skippy Kamakawiwo'ole?" No, I'm not that Skippy.

(Laughter)

SD: Even though I look like him.

(Laughter)

SD: I got it from my Uncle Sam.

WN: You know you talk a lot about family. You know, family values and so forth. Was Pālama a family?

SD: Yeah. That's what it was. It was like an extended family for me. That's a good way to look at it. I never put it in those terms, but, yeah, they was part of the family unit. I think that sometimes when you look at it, they made sure that was part of the values and the things that they want to emit, was that they want to be part of the group. And it's that team concept stuff. That's why I can relate the things. They want it to be inclusive. They include people. It's not that, "Eh, you're over there, and me over here." Exclude.

They were always friendly. And they were always firm. You just knew where they were coming from. And if you had any feeling of empathy for the other one, you going do the right thing.

WN: What about fairness? Were they fair?

- SD: Yeah, I think they were. That's the cornerstone. You not going be fair, you just not gonna move unless you have one real *da kine* Stalin-esque kind of set up where you just kill all the millions of. . . . You can't do that.
- WN: Okay, I'm gonna bring you now, sort of, the present day and you know you're working with kids today. How different are kids today than they were when you were a kid? Or are they different?
- SD: Um, no, I don't think—I use the example of, you know, kids are kids are kids. I got a kid that's six feet, five [inches], 340 pounds. I shake my finger at him, the mentality is still, a kid is a kid is a kid who wants direction, eh? And big or small, a kid is a kid. You gotta treat 'em with respect, but let 'em know, if you're the teacher, he's a kid. If he's the learner, you're the teacher. And you get all that squared away, the stuff is okay, eh? You just gotta have 'em in that context.
- WN: So you think that Pālama Settlement, for example, it's continuing. Should it continue, do they have to change at all?
- SD: Maybe be more aware of some other things that might have developed in determining what to help people in. They be more aware of, say, like abuse in family units. They gotta become more aware of that. Or they become more aware of the educational needs, maybe of the elementary school kids. That'll help them in helping the kids. That kind stuff.
- But I think the core of the things that they want to do, I don't think they should change. That retains the character and semblance of what the people who went through it see. If the stuff is working good, don't go fix it some more. Unless it's a compelling thing that you see that you need to include into your program. Be nice if they could get more help from the private sector. And whatever sector, public, private, anywhere they can get it. I think sometimes, actually there's always a need for streamlining a program to make it more efficient, but you always gotta try to bring new help in. That volunteerism stuff. If they can get more of that it'll make the haul easier.
- WN: Well, today too, actually there's more things for kids to do. I don't know if you would agree. Seems like there's so many other things, like TV and things to keep kids occupied and so forth. You think we need more Pālama Settlements?
- SD: Oh, indubitably. Heard that one, eh? Indubitably. I think we do. I would support that wholeheartedly. Just that logic and reason will tell you that if in this context, in this group, has done this much, if more of them are here, more things will happen in that respect.

Yeah, we can always handle more. But the goals and the vision of Pālama Settlement is great, but then [they] don't want to put up ten places when they only should've put up two. And now they gotta close all ten of them 'cause they're not making it. You gotta deal with that reality part, where if there is a stream of funds going help 'em, then yeah, they should have more. But they cannot just make more and then fall down in the process. And I think that's what they gotta be aware of.

You get some shakers and you get some movers in this state. And I tell you, if you can get guys like Walter Dods [chairman and CEO of First Hawaiian Bank] for come Pālama

Settlement, and help Pālama Settlement, Pālama Settlement going be in good shape. Or you going get one guy like Mike Aiona, classmate. Bert Kobayashi, contractor. Phenomenal person and he helped get that thing back. You get a few of those and they going help one growing concern. It'll expand. Like the Weinberg guys. You know [Harry & Jeanette] Weinberg Foundation *wen* provide plenty. I think that kind of partnership come through. Both of 'em seeking social changes and help and shit, they going work together.

WN: Mm hmm.

SD: But yeah, I think there is a need.

WN: So, funding is the major problem?

SD: Anytime you get one private organization the funding gotta come. Unless you get one supplier like Microsoft. But even then you gotta have one organized, limited scale. Otherwise that well going drain, too. It's gotta be self-sufficient. More better still.

WN: You think Pālama will survive?

SD: I sure hope so. I sure hope so. But I tell you, the burden of the fund-raising activities is falling onto less shoulders. And some guys been there for long time, like the Rath family. I mean, if they give up, the goals, the chances of it dissipating to zero might be very evident.

WN: What would be the consequences if, say, Pālama Settlement closes down?

SD: You gonna have an increase in many things not beneficial to people in the area: economics, social. You gonna break down family units. Guarantee going happen. I mean, it's happening even with that. Maybe, hopefully, on a lesser scale, but guarantee they sure as hell not gonna alleviate the problem by not providing a service like that. But somewhere down the line there's a gauge—you know empathy, education and hard life. You get little empathy and you going get hard life. Something that works in there and it's gotta be addressed.

And the person in the doldrums has this—grab 'em by the bootstraps. It's phenomenal from that standpoint. And all it takes is a bunch of education, a bunch of determination and you can go from Mayor Wright housing to governor. You know what I mean? Keep your nose on the grindstone and turn the wheel, baby. You just gotta do it that way.

WN: Yeah.

SD: But, the need is there. Hell, yeah, the need is there. It's a help that is tremendously needed. And if they going down, baby, it'll affect negatively. But if we could generate the income through some creative means. It can stay and I hope it does stay.

WN: Okay, thank you very much.

SD: I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

Reflections of Pālama Settlement

Volume I

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