

JOSEPHINE HOPKINS GARNER

and

GERD HIORTH BLODGETT

Interview by Alex H. F. Castro

June 8, 1981

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ALEX CASTRO'S INTERVIEW

with

JOSEPHINE HOPKINS GARNER

and

GERD HIORTH BLODGETT

June 8, 1981

C: Here we are at the Outrigger Canoe Club and we are overlooking the beautiful Pacific Ocean on this lovely afternoon of June 8, 1981. This is Alex Castro, and I am about to interview two of the great swimmers of the early days of the Outrigger Canoe Club. They are, in order of interview, Josephine Hopkins, now Garner, and Gerd Hiorth, now Blodgett. In the years around 1917 and on up they were friends here in Honolulu and have been ever since.

Josephine, as I understand it you entered the Club before Gerd did. Is that correct?

G: That's right.

C: Tell me about the circumstances.

G: Well, I was noticed by Judge (William T.) Rawlins swimming at Kuhio Beach and after watching me for a number of months he decided that I should belong to the Outrigger Club, so he put me in as a member of the Outrigger Club in 1916. In 1917 I swam for the Outrigger Club against Dorothy Burns, then Pacific Coast champion, in the 50, 100 and 220.

C: Was this tank swimming?

G: No, this was down at Pier 2 in Honolulu Harbor.

C: Oh. Pretty clear water in those days.

G: That's right, and I placed second in the 50, 100 and 220.

C: Was that a Pacific meet?

G: No, it was an AAU meet.

C: An AAU meet. I see, and that was in 1917. We have a picture in our display case of an AAU swimming medley, not medley, but...

G: Relay?

C: Relay team that was held at the Kuhio Wharf in Hilo on the 12th of November, 1949, and you and Gerd were both on that team, and you won, didn't you?

G: That's right.

C: And that was also held right in Hilo Harbor?

G: Right at the pier in Hilo Harbor.

C: Weren't you afraid of sharks or anything like that? They didn't have them in those days.

G: There weren't any sharks, but....

B: I was petrified because I swam on the outside lane towards the open ocean.

C: Gerd, you were petrified? That's the first time I have ever heard about you being petrified.

G: And cold.

C: It was cold?

B: It was very cold.

C: Oh, yeah, November 12, it should have been cold. I understand, Josephine that in those days you had a nickname - Phena?

G: That's right.

C: That's the end of Josephine.

B: Everyone called her Phena. Phena Hopkins.

C: Ah, but there was one guy who called you Freckles, Gerd.

B: Oh!

C: I don't know, but was he a member of the Club?

B: Ah, he was a Hui Nalu member, and I don't think he was a member of the Outrigger, but he gave me my first so-called training.

C: I see. Well...

B: And I swam unattached, oh, for a year or two I think, before I joined the Outrigger.

C: And you joined the Outrigger under what circumstances?

B: I believe Phena suggested it.

C: Josephina.

B: Josephina.

C: Josephina talked you into it, eh?

B: Yes, uh, uh.

C: Well, Josephine, tell me a little bit more about your swimming career. I understand that you were an open water swimmer and that sometimes Gerd would beat you in the tank.

G: Oh, she'd beat me all the time in the tank. I think I beat her once, and that's about it. Yes, she beat me all the time in the tank.

B: Quick on the turns...

G: Except once I think I beat her. But, not too often.

B: But, I was only a sprinter, I never swam above 100 yards. Josephine swam 220, 440, a mile.

G: 880...

B: Yes.

G: A mile and a half.

B:as well as the sprints.

C: Are we talking only about freestyle? What we call freestyle today?

B: Pertaining to this, yes.

C: Did you ever swim any other style?

B: Oh, I swam breaststroke and backstroke.

C: Breaststroke and backstroke?

G: I swam a little of both, but I don't dare tell you where I placed!

C: I understand you got quite proficient at one time in the breaststroke. Is that correct?

B: Well, I won a tank meet once, 50-yard breaststroke, um...

C: What tank?

B: YMCA, that was the only other tank they did have...Alakea and Hotel. They put bleachers around, you know.

C: We have a picture of one of the meets, I don't know if it was one that you were in. They did put bleachers around. I belonged to the YMCA when I was an elementary school kid, and I remember that tank very, very well. I remember its chlorine content was unusually high. But, you did win your breaststroke, didn't you?

B: Yes, uh, uh.

C: And, did they let the record stand?

B: No, they disqualified me. Ha, ha, because I pulled my arms back too far.

C: In accordance with what standard?

B: Well, I don't know what the rules were then, but I had not been admonished or reprimanded or scolded for swimming wrong while I was training, so I was miffed.

C: Wasn't there some lady swimmer of some national prominence whose standards the judges were taking?

B: Well, I don't know. What I was following I thought was a picture of Annette Kellerman that was a beautiful picture. She was supposed to have a perfect body and she had her arms way back and her back arched and her toes pointed, and the caption beneath it said "the perfect end to a perfect backstroke" - breaststroke, excuse me, so I swam that way and then I was told that the breaststroke should end with the arms, um.....

C: Perpendicular to the body...eh? So you were disqualified....

B: I was disqualified even though I won, and I wasn't too happy about that.

C: That's too bad. Did you want to blame your trainer or anybody like that?

B: Well....

[Pause]

C: So, Annette Kellerman was the perfect breaststroker, but the judges didn't understand. Is that about....

B: That's the way I felt about it.

C: That's great. Josephine, I understand that you did other things other than just swimming, like surfing?

G: Oh, yes. Yes, I took up surfboard riding and used to spend all my days out there in the surf from eight o'clock in the morning until lunchtime. Change the bathing suit. Rest for

an hour. Back out on the board again until five o'clock - every day.

C: Isn't that marvellous. Did you ever get into any contests?

G: Yes, I did. In 1917 I took part in the women's surfboard championship at Queen's Surf.

C: And, you won.

G: I won.

C: Isn't that great. What kind of board did you have?

G: Oh, it was one of the big heavy boards, but I managed to be able to carry it down to the beach by myself. Had a lot of good guys rooting for me such as Charlie Lambert, "Sonny" Ruttman, Harold Harvey, and Clair Tait. I was under Clair Tait's tutelage, you know, at that time. He was the coach for the Club and "Dad" Center was the captain.

C: And those are names of course that are known to this Club.

G: Oh, yes indeed.

C: And you swam, I mean you surfed under the Outrigger colors? That's just wonderful. And did you ever get into surfing, Gerd?

B: In a mild way.

C: Tandem?

B: Always tandem. No, I never managed the surfboard.

C: All right, now, we are going to talk about some other things in a moment...We've had a moment's intermission...We want to complete the record, and, er, Phena, that's Josephine Hopkins Garner, suddenly remembered an unusual situation of contesting her surfboard abilities with one of the other young ladies of Waikiki beach. I don't know whether she was a member of the Club. Would you like to tell us about it?

G: Yes, she was a member of the Club and a very good surfer, so we went out this particular morning to catch all these waves at Queen's Surf, but I had such a lot...a good rooting section.

B: This was competition?

G: Oh, yes, this was competition and we had to do certain things.

C: Just the two of you?

G: Just the two of us that I remember. There might have been

others, but I think there were just the two of us, and what else can I say, except that I won.

C: Wasn't there some guy out there to cheer you on?

G: Oh, yes, there were several guys, particularly one, Harold Harvey. He was really rooting for me. The others were, too, but he seemed to be more interested in the size of the wave I caught and so forth and said "Come on, Phena, catch this wave".

C: What kind of tricks were you expected to do?

G: Oh, we had to stand up and slide a certain way on the wave. We had to stand up and turn around, and we had to surf a little ways backwards, you know, but they didn't press it too much.

C: You had that one, called now, ten, ten toes on the front or whatever the term is now?

G: Oh, my, we could never compete with the ones that do it now, that's for sure.

C: A different kind of board wasn't it?

G: Oh, yes. Different size of a wave, too.

B: Oh, indeed.

C: Gerd, what were you doing all this time, just sitting on the beach charming the young men?

B: Oh, no, I was - er...

C: Rooting?

B: Well, I didn't go in for the surfboard, I swam along with the surfboard training to swim out to the big surf and all just to get my wind, and then I'd do a little surfing, but this was in the days when Knute Cottrell was on the surfboard and I swam alongside.

C: That was a form of training?

B: That's right. And, then sometimes we would go down to Fort DeRussy, and he would walk along the seawall, and it was deep swimming there in the channel, and I think there was a pipe sticking out of the water and he knew what the distance was so he could time me as I was training, also.

C: That's...I'm not aware, of course, I am not a swimmer or a contestant any more these days but I don't think they train swimmers that way any more, do they?

B: Oh, "Dad" Center did. Every day I had to swim out to the big surf and back.

C: I mean, today.

B: Oh, today, I don't know about that, but my regular routine was out to the big surf every day and back. I did that every single day.

C: And he would go along on the board.

B: That's right.

C: I'll be darned. Do you still go swimming out to the surf, Gerd?

B: No, I haven't been swimming for years.

C: You haven't! Just because they closed the YMCA tank?

B: No. No. Just because I have problems with my hair.

C: Other things to do.

B: Yes.

C: And what did you do with your board. How often do you take that out, Josephine?

G: Oh, I used to go out every day in the surf.

C: I mean now.

G: Oh, now! I haven't taken one out for years.

C: You haven't! Well, my goodness...

G: Guess I'd better do it, eh?

C: You ought to do it every day.

G: Yes, that's what my son says.

C: What did you do with your board?

G: I don't know, I borrowed one from the Club.

C: Gave it to your son.

G: No, it was one that "Dad" used to loan me all the time.

C: Well, now, that...

B: Josephine was one of "Dad's" pets.

C: Oh.

B: Oh, yes, his favorite of all. It was obvious. When he would come to pick up all the girls he would always want Josephine to sit next to him on the front seat.

C: Did he call her Phena?

B: Everybody called her Phena, yes.

C: And only one guy called you Freckles?

B: Oh I had no nickname, my name was funny enough.

C: Well, now I...

G: Another one who was out in the surf was "Mouse" Smith.

B: Oh, yes, "Mouse" Smith.

G: Do you remember "Mouse" Smith? Werner Smith was his name, his father used to be Jared Smith who wrote for the Advertiser.

C: Oh, yes, yes.

G: Well, "Mouse" Smith was another one at that particular time. One of the guys out there rooting for me.

C: Sounds like quite a rooting section. Do you think we have come to the end of our interview? Do you have any other fond memories?

G: I think I do, I have so many fond memories. I have fond memories of my swimming with all these thirty men from the Elks Club to the Outrigger Club and earning my swimming team pin, and a special medal swimming with forty men, including Duke Kahanamoku.

C: Oh, I've heard his name.

G: Believe it or not I beat out old man (A. H. "Bert") Tarleton. Do you remember him?

C: I don't remember old man Tarleton. I see a gold pin hanging around your neck. Its a medal - solid gold.

G: That's right.

C: And, what does it say on it?...It says "Open Water, Ladies, 50-Yard Swim, November 3, 1917". That's four months after I was born! (Laughter). "First Place". And that gives an indication... What other wonderful things do you want to talk about?

G: Don't you think its fun to mention the opening of the University of Hawaii swimming pool, and the Yale swimming team that came here? They had a swimming meet at the University - many of the

Outrigger girls participated, and I won the Ladies' Plunge record, and came in second in the 50 and the 100, but I am sorry I don't remember who came first in the 50 and the 100.

C: Well, they don't matter do they?

G: I think Lorrin Thurston was, er...

C: Maybe Lorrin.

G: Probably, I mean I think he took part in that swimming meet at that time.

B: That was what year?

G: 1917.

C: Was this boys and girls?

G: Wait a minute, 1921.

C: Was this boys and girls?

G: Just a boys' swimming team that came over from Yale University.

C: You were swimming and you took second.

G: I took second in the 50 and the 100 yards.

C: Against the boys?

G: No, no, against girls.

C: Against girls.

G: And I won the plunging record for women.

C: Plunging record - what does that mean?

G: You plunge, dive down, see how long you can hold your breath and see how far you can go. They don't do that anymore, I believe.

B: I used to win the plunge at Punahou.

C: Really? At the Waterhouse pool, which is now a thing of the past?

B: No. I was the best all around swimmer at Punahou for three years in succession.

C: Really? My goodness, we should put you in the Hall of Fame. You know, I might tell you ladies, that a copy of this tape goes to

Punahou because there are so many people that are associated with the Outrigger Canoe Club that were Punahou students, so we have duplicate tapes, and the people who are doing the further work - I am only doing the interviewing - but the typing, and the recording and the rest of it, all done by Punahou grads. They are your old friends, like Margaret Young and Kenny Pratt - people like that.

What other fond memories do you have, Josephine?

G: They were some of the loveliest years of our lives. Yes, indeed, and the fun years when I took care of the girls' swimming team and used to take them to the Punahou tank twice a week when "Dad" was in Europe at the Olympic Games.

C: "Dad" was in Europe, that was...

G: I was in charge of the girls - 1924, I believe it was '24, I'm really not sure.

C: And Duke was still swimming then.

G: Duke was still swimming and I took charge of the girls' swimming team and took them to the Punahou tank twice a week for about six months.

C: And you were the coach?

G: I was the coach.

C: My goodness. You were out of school by then.

G: Yes, I was out of school.

C: But they still liked you - you were still young, a relatively young woman weren't you.

G: That's right.

C: Not relative to the students, but...

G: Not too many years ahead of them. No, but a few years makes such a difference when you are in your teens. A few years made a lot of difference, then. If it was two years why it seemed like you were six years older. They were very, very happy days.

C: Indeed they sound like very happy days, I only witnessed the end of it but this deep water swimming has become rather rare now. We don't have too many participants, but in those days I think that probably it was more common, from what I hear.

G: I was trying to remember, too, when I went to Hawaii, I went up to Hilo and raced in the canoe races for girls one year, but I don't remember the year.

- C: But it was in that period, '17 to...
- G: No, later than that, after '19, I believe.
- C: You haven't always lived in Hawaii, have you?
- G: Yes. When I got married we went away, Jerry and I went away from '46 to '52 with my two sons, but we still kept up our membership. I had a non-resident membership.

[Pause]

- C: We had a temporary interruption there because we decided not to tell the entire story about membership, but Membership Committees do get screwed up, but Josephine is still a member.
- G: And, a good paying member I might add.
- C: Josephine, let me ask you a question. In those days when you were training to be a swimmer were there a lot of girls who were training with you or did you have just a couple of characters, or...
- G: No, the first time I trained for my first swimming meet I trained with about twenty or thirty boys, more or less.
- C: Did you always get in before dark?
- G: I had to. I had a very strict grandfather.
- C: And how did you do with the boys, were you...
- G: Perfect. They were all like my brothers, they just took good care of me.
- C: The old Aloha spirit, eh?
- G: Very much so.
- C: The ohana.
- G: They certainly were, looking after my welfare all the time.
- C: Yes, I remember being a gentleman once. Gerd, did you go training with a bunch of boys?
- B: No, I think I came along later, you see, when there were more girls on the team.
- C: And less gentlemanly.
- B: Oh, no, they were always gentlemen.

G: And very, very protective.

B: Yes, they were. It seemed nice.

C: Well, I suspect from this interview that you recall those days very, very fondly, and we will have time later on if you want to add P.Ss to this, but at the moment, this is the end of our interview at the Outrigger Canoe Club on Monday, June 8, 1981, with Josephine Hopkins Garner and Gerd Hiorth Blodgett.

C: O K. Here's another P.S.

Josephine, you know, I am very interested. You're part Hawaiian, I know. How did you get the name Hopkins? Would you mind telling us.

G: Well, I was adopted by my grandfather, Charles Hopkins. He was Marshall during King Kalakaua's reign. And when Queen Liliu became Queen she had her own Marshall and my grandfather became Hawaiian interpreter in the courts until his death. My grandfather legally adopted me and raised me.

C: That's called "hanai"?

G: "Hanai" - yes.

C: So you are a Hopkins by virtue of your grandfather's adoption.

G: That's right.

C: And he was very strict about you training with all those guys out there...

G: Yes, very strict.

[Pause]

C: Now, Gerd, I understand...it is obvious with your original name that you are not part Hawaiian. How come you're such a kamaaina? Can you tell us that?

B: I came to the Islands when I was two years old. It so happened that my father was Norwegian - my mother and father were both Norwegian. And he had gone from South America back to Oslo looking for a job, and at that time Liverpool was the clearing house for all people in Europe who were seeking employment away from the countries that were economically below par at that time. And he went in to the office in Liverpool and said that his early

training had only been in sugar plantation work. Was there anyone seeking that sort of help?

They announced to him that a man had been in there the day before by the name of Hans Peter Faye from the Island of Kauai in the Sandwich Islands who was looking for - recruiting help for the sugar industry. So they met - and therefore my father came to the Islands and in due course my mother followed with my sister and myself when I was about two years old. And we went to the Island of Kauai and settled down there in the hottest part of the island which was Waimea. [Laughter].

My childhood was spent on Kauai and then we came to Honolulu before World War I.

C: And that's how you became a kamazina.

B: O-o-o-h, it's imbued.

C: And you've never gone back to anywhere else.

B: And I'm where I want to live the rest of my life.

C: Gerd, you were talking about the medals which you had won, swimming. Could you be more specific as to what those were?

B: Well, aside from all the bronze medals that I got for third place, I did win a few gold ones, but I think that what I appreciate most was the fact that I won the Thurston medal for being the best all around swimmer at Punahou for three years in a row. And this was a silver pin that was donated by Lorrin A. Thurston.

C: Potter Thurston's father.

B: Potter Thurston's father, yes. And he himself was there in the assembly hall and presented this to me in open session with all the other students.

C: The old man was there?

B: The old man was there and gave me the Thurston medal which he had put up. I being the best all around swimmer. And I got it three years in a row. It almost meant more to me than the gold medals I won.

C: Now these were all in one particular evening or afternoon? Three years in a row?

B: Yes, I got the medals separately. One year it was announced that I was the best swimmer - then the second year - and then the third year.

- C: That's great. Thank you. I didn't realize that you were a three-time winner.
- B: And this was the little old Punahou tank. We used to call it the little old tank - before the Waterhouse pool. And to swim 50 yards I forget how many laps and how many turns.
- C: What kind of a swimming suit did you have?
- B: The full wool swimming suit with the legs down half way to the knees and the little skirts over it - and high necks...(Laughter)
- C: You didn't have any of those funny suits that Josephine Hopkins had - Silk...
- B: Oh, that came later. The racing suits that "Dad" Center ordered.
- C: If you had had one of those Italian swimming suits do you think you would have made faster time?
- B: The chaperones would have objected. (Laughter)
- C: Josephine, in the days when they were doing all those crazy things in the - the old Punahou tank...
- G: Going back to the Outrigger - I never did swim races in the Punahou tank, did I Gerd? No, it was the YMCA tank. I never did swim at Punahou.
- C: Well, didn't you girls get rub downs, or something like that?
- G: When I first started swimming for the Club I used to get a rub down for that.
- C: Who rubbed you down? Duke Kahanamoku?
- G: Clair Tait.
- B: And Francis Bowers.
- G: No, Clair Tait.
- B: Francis Bowers gave me rub downs.
- G: Francis Bowers and Clair Tait.
- C: Both nice guys.
- G: Oh, very. And we had to be chaperoned. Always had to be chaperoned.
- C: You always had a chaperone standing by.
- G: Mrs. Fullard-Leo. And after Mrs. Fullard-Leo, Leslie Hicks' sister, I can't think of her first name.

C: Mrs. Fullard-Leo would be a proper chaperone, I am sure.

G: Oh, she was a wonderful chaperone. Strict as anything.

C: I just think that's marvellous. Today, when you get a rub down - there isn't anybody to rub you down - let alone get a chaperone.
(Laughter)

[Pause]

C: Josephine, you've been talking a lot about medals. Did you ever have a favorite medal that you won?

G: Yes, I think the medal for the mile-and-a-half swim from the Elks Club to the Outrigger Club with about thirty of the guys. I think that means as much to me as any. And winning my swimming team pin at the same time. In 1917.

C: You beat all the boys.

G: Not all, but many of them.

C: And you got back on to the beach before dark because of Grandfather Hopkins. (Laughter)

Gerd, what was your favorite medal? Not talking about gold or bronze.

B: As I said, my Thurston medal. I'll explain why I think why it meant so much to me. I knew when I won the 50 yard dash, or the 100 yard dash, or the breaststroke or the backstroke or the plunge but there was one girl there who was absolutely beautiful with a lovely figure. When it came to the springboard and the high diving, which wasn't very high in the little Punahou tank...

C: How high?

B: Oh, I think only about 10 feet. The springboard was, I think, average. She got up and floated through the air and in to the water and there were only two or three little bubbles where her toes went in. Such perfection that I knew that the diving was hers. I was so astounded, and to this very day I cannot believe that I could possibly have won the diving over this beautiful diving that Madeline Chapin did...but I won.

C: You won!

B: I won it.

C: Toes and all.

B: I never had seen it in camera or slow motion or fast motion because they didn't take pictures in those days. I would have given

my eye teeth - and still would today - to have seen how I could possibly have been a better diver than the beautiful perfection that was Madeline Chapin.

C: In the old Punahou tank. Whatever happened to Madeline Chapin, or whatever her name is?

B: Well, I don't know that she is with us any more. I think that she is no longer living.

C: She has taken has last dive.