

## Add water

Continued from page 52

were Robert Dick and Tommy Fink, fellow students and athletes at Punahou and certainly two of the strongest boys alive in those days. Bobby Daniels, a Hawaiian, was the son of Chick Daniels, the head beachboy at the Royal. Sammy Kaaua was another Hawaiian, and I remember how sincere he was the day he told me his uncle had actually seen Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire. It had happened on a lonely beach at night on the island of Hawai'i during an eruption of Kīlauea. Pele, long-haired and wreathed in orange flames, with molten lava flowing behind her, had smiled and beckoned to him with her slender hand. He had been tempted, but finally managed to turn and walk quickly away.

**I**t was Sammy who introduced me to spearfishing. On a warm June morning he took me to a little store on Beretania Street where a white-haired Japanese man sold me a spear, Hawaiian sling and face mask. The 6-foot metal spear, about as big around as a pencil, had a hinged barb an inch from its tempered point. The Hawaiian sling was a very simple mechanism: two 18-inch lengths of strong surgical rubber lashed to a 6-inch bamboo handle. The heavy cord that joined the ends of the rubber fit into the notch at the rear of the spear, which could then be shot through the hollow handle in much the same way an arrow is shot from a bow.

"Walking to the beach?" the man asked Sammy.

"I guess we'll catch a bus."

"Here," he said, and took a small cork from somewhere behind his counter and stuck it to my spear point. "The driver won't let you on without a cork. You ever gone spearing before?"

Rather ashamed to admit it, I shook my head no.

"You'll like it plenty. When you need more things, you come back here."

About an hour later we walked down the beach from the Outrigger Club and into the warm water directly in front of the Moana Hotel. A quarter mile out, in blue water, small waves broke at Canoe Surf. Three or four board surfers were out there, and a single outrigger canoe. Where we stood the shallow water seemed light green, with dark clumps and patches of coral dotting the bottom.

"Spit into your mask before you put it on," Sammy told me. "Rub it around inside the glass. That way it won't fog up. You can use seaweed instead of spit—but

there's none around. It's low tide. It might be good today."

We cleaned our masks, washed them out and pulled them on.

"OK!" he said. "Follow me!"

We walked out 20 or 30 yards over coarse-grained sand, Sammy leading the way. When we were waist-deep and the first sizable dark patch showed on the bottom just ahead, Sammy lowered himself into the water. With his head under, he pushed forward, kicking slowly, pulling with his right arm and holding his spear and sling with his left.

My first few seconds under water produced a memorable combination of amazement and fear. Through the face mask, the water had become as clear as air. Bright sunlight shimmered over rocks, coral, sand—and more fish than I'd ever dreamed there'd be.

About 50 yards behind me, tourists sat eating breakfast under the banyan tree on the Moana patio. In front of me, everywhere I looked, were fish of every imaginable shape and color. They glided close over the sandy bottom, peered from holes and crevices in the coral, cruised from shadow into sunlight. They were silver, white, black, brown, blue, green, yellow, orange.

A few feet ahead of me, Sammy drew his spear back in his sling, aimed, then let go. It hit a broad-sided silver fish with vertical black stripes that had been cruising close over the bottom near the base of a coral ledge. I saw the point enter just behind the eye. The fish began to quiver and flip at the end of the spear, throwing up a cloud of sand from the bottom. Then, just as Sammy grabbed the end of his spear, something large, dark and very fast shot out from the ledge. In a fraction of a second it was gone. Sand still clouded the bottom. When Sammy pulled his fish toward the surface, I saw that only the mutilated head remained on the spear. Blood spread thinly, and a dark red gill plate showed.

I backed off and stood up, surprised to find that we were still in waist-deep water. When I glanced over my shoulder, there were the tourists, enjoying their breakfast under the banyan tree.

"A goddamn moray!" Sammy said. "You see that? You see what it did?"

"Sure I saw it. Hell yes."

I wanted to turn and hurry to shore, but of course I didn't. I pulled my face mask off to see Sammy more clearly. Although I was standing on sand, I backed another two or three steps away from the ledge. "What should we do?" I asked him. I was shaking, perhaps from my fear, perhaps from the trade wind cool against my wet back.

"The son-of-a-bitch won't bother us," he said. "He wanted the *manini*. Look at that."

His own face mask off now, he held what was left of the fish in front of us. The teeth of the moray had severed flesh and bone.

**O**n many days that followed, I speared with Sammy and Bobby at Waikiki. We swam slowly through the shallow water, exploring every reef and ledge within a couple of hundred yards of shore.

Splashing and sudden movement would frighten the fish, so I soon learned to swim and dive smoothly, trying not to disturb the surface. Though we weren't overly competitive about it, I was glad I could spear as many fish in a day as my companions. Sometimes I took a fish or two home—most often *aweoweo*—but we usually gave what we killed to Bobby's father.

Most of the fish we speared were the common species: *manini*, *palani*, *hinālea*, *moana*. Occasionally we found the more desired reef fish—*aweoweo*, *kūmū*, *āhole-hole* and squirrel fish)—far back in holes and crevices. But we were reluctant to spear them, because hiding in those same holes and crevices were the morays.

I saw at least one moray every time I went out. Most of them were a darkish shade of brown, although occasionally an individual, usually a small one, showed stripes or even spots. Sometimes only their heads protruded from a hole or from underneath a ledge—evil-looking heads that swelled with every respiration, jaws slowly opening and closing, large mouths studded with rows of needle-sharp teeth. Sometimes I saw them moving along the bottom from one crevice or ledge to another, their thick, snakelike bodies smooth and scaleless, the long muscles distinct as they slid fluidly along.

The sight of a moray frightened me as much as anything ever had. I never went near one, and if one appeared unexpectedly I left the area at once. I could tell that Sammy and Bobby were frightened of them too. But we talked about spearing morays, and I knew that sooner or later I'd have to try it.

**M**ost teenage boys have heroes and idols, and in my time these were usually actors or athletes. But I wasn't impressed by actors, because many famous ones stayed at the Royal Hawaiian, and I had seen what they really were, up close. And perhaps because Hawai'i was so far removed from college and profes-