



Laura Jane Musser and  
family papers.

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## Laura Jane Musser



### My first experience with a hurricane

(Written Wednesday, November 24, 1982, the day after it occurred).

By now many newspaper readers have read about Hurricane "Iwa" striking the islands of Hawaii on Tuesday, November 23, 1982, and about the devastation it created in its wake -- particularly on the islands of Kavi and Niihan west of Oahu where Honolulu is located, and where I have been vacationing for the past six weeks at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

I happened to be one of this hurricane's witnesses, rather than its victims, for which I am extremely thankful -- an appropriate attitude for the Thanksgiving holiday which is tomorrow.

Like the majority of people, I only know from descriptions by others (including a cousin of mine who was living in New England at the time of the terrible 1938 hurricane there), how frightening a hurricane is, for it is one of the major displays of violent naked force unleashed by nature and a grim reminder of its superiority to that of humanity and its vaunted technology.

For the past few days before it happened, unusually warm, extremely humid, heavy, gloomy weather permeated the atmosphere, making all of us feel "played out" and spiritless but also a little concerned as to the cause. Certainly we never suspected a hurricane. Hurricane occurrences on the Hawaiian Islands are few and far between (the last one occurred here in 1959 causing far less damage than this one).

Since I am not an avid TV viewer, my first inkling of the hurricane's advent was a few strong puffs of gusty winds which greeted me on my way to breakfast in the "open air" hotel dining room which fronts the ocean, and has a superb view.

I was swirled around the corner of the entrance to the elevator section, and rudely pushed down the arcade leading to the hotel lobby -- an elderly lady was coming toward me, and struggling against the wind, casually remarking that a hurricane was on its way. I made it to the dining room finishing breakfast to the accompanying noise of sliding patio doors being closed and furniture being stacked up in the hallways. I then returned to my room on the 14th floor, battling the increasing strength of the wind whistling around that corner entrance to the elevator section by holding onto the hands of other hotel guests going that way.

Once in my room, I stayed there the entire day watching the gathering fury of the hurricane through the closed glass doors of my balcony fronting the ocean side. Rain was falling in sheets, and two pathetic bedraggled pigeons had sought shelter under two balcony metal chairs. Down below, I

could glimpse waving palm trees bent nearly to the ground and rolling crested waves hurling themselves on shore, driving before them huge portions of beach sand on to the 'outdoor pool' area just below my balcony.

By dinner time in the evening, we were all told to come down early to eat in the 'indoor' dining room, as there would probably be a 'power failure' and we might be stranded in the elevators, and unable to obtain hot food. Halfway through dinner all the lights went out, and the rest of the meal was consumed by candlelight and the light of 'hurricane' kerosene lanterns. Through all this tension people and staff remained remarkably calm. Even the little children didn't seem upset, and a 'string quartette' bravely strummed

"Hawaiian melodies" in the semi-darkness.

When I left to go to my room, the manager and two "staff" men were helping us guests to round that breezy corner to the elevators as the winds had reached a gale of 50 (or more) miles per hour. The manager remarked that we had best take the 'emergency' stairs. Since my room was on the 14th floor I had nearly 200 stairs to ascend which reminded me of the time I climbed the Washington Monument as a 'teenager'. A staff member obligingly accompanied me to see that doors could be opened easily. I made it safely to my room -- going to bed with my clothes on in case of an 'emergency call' -- and fell asleep despite the fiendish howling of the winds now blowing with a force of nearly 100 miles an hour outside my balcony doors.

Such was the adventure of my first hurricane. Today, it is again lovely and sunny weather, and despite the power failure and other aftermath destruction of property, many of us are thankful to be alive and unharmed despite this nerve wracking experience.



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