

Tom Remembers Saving Jew Boy



Tom (in center) with comrades (one of whom might be Jew Boy) circa 1928.

My father wrote this (and I debated whether to edit out the phrase “Jew Boy” and decided to leave it in because that’s how he wrote it)...

When we arrived in Hawaii all the ships tied up at docks. The first thing we saw was some of the girls that we left on the docks in San Francisco. They followed us here.

The big ships were anchored out in the harbor and were going on to the Philippines and maybe on to China. They could not get into the docks to fill up their fresh water tanks. We had to tie up our smaller ship to the docks and fill our water tanks and go back and tie up to the big ships and pump the water into their tanks. They really worked our butts off for two days and nights, some men around the clock. We didn’t know whether our ship would go on with the fleet until they sailed early one morning and we were left in Honolulu.

After that we went around and anchored in the big channel. There were some half a dozen ships left there with us.

That was the most beautiful place I had ever seen. Such beautiful blue water! Toward the island of Honolulu, two miles to shore, it looked like a thousand acre field of pineapples on the right and a thousand acre field of sugar cane on the left. Beyond the pineapple and sugar cane fields was a mountain, several hundred feet high. We found out later this was the most beautiful mountain there was. There was a road on the top of the mountain.

A bunch of guys hounded Mr. Hall for permission to swim the two miles to shore to the pineapple field. Mr. Hall told every one of us, if you weren’t sure you could swim two miles, not to go.

I was still aboard ship. Several of the guys were about half way to shore and somebody came running up to me and said, “Tom, do you remember that big kind of fat boy from Kentucky that you had a hell of a time trying to give swimming lessons?”

“Yes, I called him Jew Boy. He’s not out there is he?”

“Yes he is.”

“How far out?”

“A pretty good distance by now.”

“I will see if I can catch up with him and you get a hold of Mr. Hall and tell him to get his boat out as soon as possible.”

I finally caught up with Jew Boy and he said, “Tom, I’m really glad to see you.”

“Well, I’m not all that glad to see you out here. What in the hell are you doing out here Jew Boy? You know you can’t even swim a mile.”

“I know that now, Tom. How about you getting closer to me? Put your arm under my chest and help me float.”

“And you panic and grab my arms? No way! That way we both drown.”

“Tom, you won’t let me drown, will you?”

“Well, Jew Boy, put it this way. I’m not going to drown with you, but I will help you all I can if you keep calm and quit trying to swim and try to float. Don’t panic. Float on your back. Just use your arms, hands and legs enough to keep your mouth out of the water. OK, you’re doing fine now, Jew Boy. Turn over on your belly and just try to keep calm That’s fine. Now turn on your left side. Jew Boy you’re doing beautiful now don’t you try to swim. just float. Now on your right side. Beautiful. I’m sure the boat will soon be here. Now let’s get on your back again. Yeh, fine. I’m real proud of you, Jew Boy. Now you damn, big ox, do you remember the hours we put in learning how to float back in San Pedro? You got mad as hell at me saying you were out there to learn how to swim.”

“Yep, Tom, I remember. You said first we float, and then we swim.”

“Now on your belly again, Jew Boy. Here comes the boat and I think we all should get into the boat and check with the other guys and see if anybody wants to be picked up.”

Some of the other guys were already out of the water and eating pineapple which they said this guy gave them which I doubt.

Jew Boy said, “Tom, I want the truth from you. You never intended to let me drown, did you?”

“Well you big dumb bull, the only chance you had to survive was for me to survive, and if I was to drown, you would have to drown to. And when I first got to you, Jew Boy, you were almost ready to panic. But if I could stay away from you and never let you get close enough to grab me, there was never any doubt in my mind that I could talk you into saving yourself. For I know you are full of hot air and you have enough hot air in you to float for a hell-of-a long time. You have always been full of bull. Now I’m going to run and play up and down this beautiful beach for a while then we’ll all talk about swimming back to the ship or all go back to the ship in the boat.”

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