



## The Life of a Gremmie in the '50s and '60s

By Jimmy McMahan & Brant Ackerman

As gremmies we grew up at the old Club in the late 50's and early 60's. Our parents would drop us off in the morning and leave us for the day. It was a great life of surfing, playing volleyball and getting into all kinds of pilikia.

Waikiki was our playground with hotels to explore. The Royal Hawaiian and the Moana Surfrider had passages and hideaways we found when being chased by the older guys. Exploring, we discovered unattended ice cream freezers to raid. Once we 'borrowed' a large wedding cake from the Royal.

The International Market Place was still a half-empty lot back to Kuhio Avenue. It became our Tarzan retreat. We'd play hide and seek, climb up onto the roof like a bunch of spider monkeys. The tourists probably thought it was part of the show.

Gremmies were 10-13 years old and the older guys were 15-17. We were usually at their mercy for target practice. Their idea of fun was to line us up against the fence that separated the Club from the Uluniu Swim Club and start firing volleyballs at us. If we ran away and got caught...well...there went your pants.

Every day was a new adventure and survival challenge. Each morning we'd tie our sprint suit (which we wore under our surf trunks) drawstrings in knots to make it harder to get 'pantseed'.



Jimmy McMahan surfing in his M. Nii shorts.

Downside... this involved spending a half an hour untying the knots when we got home.

Such was the life of a gremmie.

Besides the two of us, the gremmie core included Gary Vietch, Steve Fearon, Billy and Cooper Cook, Drew Flanders, Hal Burchard, Butch Ledford, Jonny Glessner, Ed Pickering and Randy Dodge.

Our surfboards were mostly made of balsa before foam was popular. We were always dinging the boards which meant a trip to see Ah Buck who had a small shop set up under the Outrigger. He repaired them for next to nothing and always called us by the same name, 'Bang Up'.

Sometimes we'd take out old 11-foot hollow boards from unlocked surfboard lockers. It would take two of us to drag them to the beach. We'd catch waves on those big hollows and aim them at the tourists before abandoning ship.

Gremmies surfed as a group at Canoes or Queens and as we got older, Populars and Number 3's. No watches back then so when surfing Canoes we depended on the OCC beach clock to tell us when it was kau kau time. When we came in from surfing it was straight to the Snack Shop. A favorite bon appetite was rice and gravy, probably cost 25 cents.

The gremmies were always on the hunt for new surf trunks. Originally we wore the Outrigger surfer style with the logo, button fly and flap waistband. M. Nii in Makaha, located in a Quonset hut,



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would custom make you a pair of knee length with stripes down the side. Take's in the Waikiki Arcade (where the Waikiki Police Station is today) was a handy source and they might have been first to offer quick drying nylon.

We all went out for paddling as 13 and unders. Our coach figured we needed red crew shirts and they had our name and crew on the front and GREMMIES in large letters on the back.

Gremmie hangout was the junior boys' locker room off baby court. It had many smells, none memorable. The green concrete floor was always wet with clogged shower drains.

The older guys, who were always out to terrorize and torment us, liked to catch one of us in there and stuff the unlucky gremmie inside a wooden locker. We would be forcibly folded to fit into a 3 foot by 2 foot locker bent like a paper clip. Sometimes they'd poke penny rockets into the air holes.

### Vault 91 and Breadfruit Alley

When the "Older Guys" were bored they would sit us in an 8-foot x 8-foot cement box in front of the electrical room door. They would then practice their pitching form by slinging rotten breadfruit at us. After being coated with ooze we would run to the ocean to rinse off.

### The Hot Box

The hot box was an old metal chill box that held ice. It was broken and just sat in the sun baking all day. The "Older Guys" would load about six or eight of us in the box and close the lid weighted down with a train wheel. About every ten minutes they would come and check on us and slide the lid open and throw a few ice cubes in for relief which was just a tease. That would be followed by a 'shower' of sand. Maybe they were trying to emulate the prisoner of war camps.

### Cold Water Bikini Trick

Every day we would go up to the Sun Deck to watch the surf. The "Older Guys" would spot an unsuspecting female victim and we were chasing each other like playing tag and accidentally spilling ice cold water on the victim's back. The victim whose top was untied for an even tan would immediately roll over providing the boys with a thrill.



The Gremmies: John Glessner, Jimmy McMahan, Drew Flanders and Gary Vieth.

### Payback

Finally, the gremmies devised the ultimate revenge. We bought Chiclets chewing gum and replaced all but the top two layers with a look-alike laxative. It was on a Saturday when we innocently strolled into the Club knowing we'd be jumped for our goodies.

Our ploy worked. Oh, did it work! And kept working! Several of the 'gum chewers' became indisposed and missed a big dance that night.

Sunday was a great day to be a GREMMIE!

*Koa Log footnote:*

*Jimmy McMahan and Brant Ackerman were gremmies who went from "locker room paper clips" to respected Boardroom Outrigger Presidents.*