

GUEST: DANIEL MARTINEZ

LSS 810 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 12/16/14

When we were on these trips back East, with my dad being in the space industry, we stopped at Gettysburg. And this park ranger came out with his Smokey the Bear hat. This park ranger gave a talk, and then he went in and he got in a Civil War uniform and came out with a musket, and fired it. And I said, That's for me.

So, you truly intended to do that when you grew up?

I just said, That's for me, but I didn't know how I was gonna get there. But that whole idea of working in a national park like Gettysburg, it was just like, How do I do this?

Daniel Martinez has been captivated by military history since childhood, and he followed his passion. Today, he's Chief Historian at the World War II Valor In the Pacific National Monument, which preserves and interprets the stories of the Pacific war, including the events at Pearl Harbor. Daniel Martinez, next on Long Story Short.

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

Aloha mai kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Daniel Martinez has been the Chief Historian at Pearl Harbor since 1989, where he keeps history alive for the many visitors from around the world who come to see where World War II began for America. History has always been an important part of Daniel's life, starting from his youth growing up in California. His German and Mexican grandparents shared stories of their lives, which started him on the path that would later lead him to become an historian.

Oh; without a doubt, my grandfather. My grandfather taught me how to fish, and I found out he was at Pearl Harbor, and he had this interest in the American West, and he was a miner. On my grandfather and grandmother's side, in particular on my grandmother's side, they grew up in Boise, Idaho, they were first immigrants to come in the late 1870s, became gold miners. And then later,

one was a sheriff. And so, we had all of that. So, on both sides of the family. My father's was more humble. My grandfather came from Mexico, from the area of Guadalajara, and emigrated here legally through the Southern Pacific Railroad. He was one of the workers. And that's how my dad ended up being born in Lone Pine, California, one of nine children. And my love for railroad and that history, especially I'm a big Southern Pacific fan, came from that. And then, my dad was in the Navy, and my dad served in the Korean War. My Aunt Jo was the first one on my mother's side to take me to a library when I was five years old, and picked up my first book, which was Custer's Last Stand. There were always these influences on reading and going to places where events happened.

When you say, you know, history really imbued your family, you had a sense of that, did you say that to yourself? You know, history is important to me. Or was that not a known specialization or concept?

If my mom was alive, she'd probably have more of a description of it. Because when I was little, I had toy soldiers, and I would recreate battles. I would read books, I would be actively involved in watching films on history. I think it was just something that was instinctively there, and thank God my family endorsed it, and not only that, took me to a number of historic places that were like these deviations off the road. And so, I don't know; I think my rudder was fixed, and I was headed that way.

You know, you're cross-cultural; Mexican, German.

Yeah; and know, the difficult part was that I didn't realize this, because even I grew up in a world that was not as judgmental. And here in Hawaii, even less. But it was called interracial marriage. And that's what my parents' marriage was, and they ran off and got married.

Because their family wouldn't support the match?

Oh, no; on both sides. You know, my grandfather on the Mexican side was hoping that my dad was gonna marry a Mexican girl, and I know for a fact on my mother's side, they wished the same. But love overcomes a lot, and they ran off and got married. And then, when I came along, all was forgiven, and the families were joined. And so, my grandfather, who was so opposed to this on my mom's side, became so close to my dad that he was like a second father.

Did you ever have the sensation of having to pick one, you know, racial background over the other?

You know, I didn't have a choice; the last name was Martinez. And I went to a Catholic high school and I went through a little bit of hazing of that. And I had a cousin named Paul Gomez, who was a scholar and a great guy, and he just said, Hey, just roll with it. Just roll with it; don't be upset over it, just be proud of it. And I always have been. And when I came to Hawaii, one of the things that touched me a great deal was the acceptance of peoples here.

People always want to know what you are, even if they're not prejudiced against you.

Right.

They want to know.

I tell them I'm sort of—

You're hapa.

Hapa; you know, and then they get that. And so, I'm very proud of our German-English background, especially what my uh, grandparents on that side did.

When your grandfather moved to Hawaii, why? He was a miner.

Yeah; the thing was that there was a company, a big company, and everybody knew it at the time, called Morrison-Knudsen. And it was located in Boise, Idaho. And they were rounding up all of these miners and construction workers. They had been given contracts to build military bases throughout the Pacific; Wake Island, Midway, all over. My grandfather was in his thirties at the time, so he was relatively mature. And he had just remarried, and he saw this opportunity, so they wanted this work. They needed tunnelers, they needed people that knew how to work with dynamite; my grandfather.

What they were going to build was twenty of these that are basically twenty-five yards in circumference. And I forget the circumference, but it's close to seventy-five yards in circumference. And these tanks were gonna be literally blasted out of the lava rock on Red Hill, and then they would use like an iron basket around it, and then gunnite that, and then use cement and build it. Now, they built these things, you know, kind of bottom up, and many men fell. And when you fall in there, even despite there's water, it doesn't come out well when you're falling eight or nine stories. you know, over two hundred feet. And so, my grandfather worked on that, and then my mother came over in '41, early '41, went to school, living the dream as I say. That's what I often say, living the dream here in Hawaii. And then, you know, went to school.

Wait a minute. Going back to those storage tanks. So, your father is working with people who are dying.

Yes; this whole thing that they were doing was secret. They tried to keep it as secret as possible. I don't know how they did that, but they just didn't want people talking about it.

But there was dynamite going off in Red Hill.

Yeah; but it was like a rumble, 'cause it's underneath the ground. And they were taking all the tailings, and they were not pulling them out of there; they were spilling them into the valley there. And you can still see some of those tailings where cement factory is now today.

So, he would go back, and he couldn't even tell your grandmother.

He'd just say they were doing tunneling.

Was he there throughout the entire twenty tanks?

Yes, he was. Yeah.

How long did that take?

It took almost 'til 1944. And you see, my family, my mom and her sisters, a baby and my Aunt Janelle [PHONETIC], who went to Roosevelt High School, they were sent back on, I think, the Mariposa, and went back to San Francisco. From there, they went back to Boise and waited, and then my grandfather returned and he needed to find work, and he knew that the war effort needed talc, and he knew where talc was. And so, he went there, and he established his family there, and opened a talc mine in the White Mountains. And my mom went to Lone Pine High School, and met one Rudy Martinez.

For the next six years after he graduated from college, Daniel Martinez taught high school in the winter, and during the summer he worked for the National Parks Service as a seasonal ranger at the Little Big Horn Battlefield. The Parks Service offered him a fulltime position at the USS Arizona Memorial, which he readily accepted. Although his grandparents had told him stories about living in Hawaii during the war, he was unprepared for what awaited him.

Although I lived in California, my friends used to go to Hawaii in the summers, I never did. And I came here for the first time, you know, in 1985 with fourteen

boxes and my girlfriend. And we were there at the airport, and we didn't know what we were in for. But it was quite an experience adjusting to Hawaii. Because there wasn't a lot of stores that we have now, and it was expensive, and I was very low grade. So, we worked some little second jobs, and things like that, to make it, make my way through.

Where did you live when you first arrived?

I lived in Aiea. And I lived right above the high school, and I didn't have a car then, so I walked to work, and then later got established, and life changed and evolved. And I was adopted, 'cause my girlfriend couldn't hack it; she went home. I came home, and I had like a Dear John letter. And the family that I stayed with, I lived on the lower end of of a home. So, it was like a little ohana. And they were just really, you know, shocked that I had a Dear John, and they were so consoling. But I couldn't afford it anymore, so Clinton Kane, who was a park ranger at the memorial, said, Come with me. And he took care of me, and I ended up living in Waimanalo with another Japanese American fellow who worked for Hawaiian Tel. And I learned to be Hawaiian. I ate food that I thought I could never eat, did things that I never thought I could do. I learned how to body board at Makapuu. And that was ... thrilling. [CHUCKLE]

And the food teaches you a lot about history of the islands, too.

It does. I never quite caught onto opihi, but I gave it a good attempt. But I started to fall in love with some of the Hawaiian foods. And if I can digress, a simple story of this kind of generosity and culture here that was unknown to me was that, where we lived, we lived close to the mountain in Waimanalo. So, when it rained, the roof was metal, and it was just a racket. But you get used to it. And then, when we would go fishing or anything, the fish that we got, we would drop off to some of the neighbors who had their farms there. And the next day, there would be vegetables or fruits left there. And it just the kind of warmth and generosity that ... didn't see that in Los Angeles.

When you said your girlfriend couldn't hack it, did you consider saying, Okay, this is really complex for me and I don't think I'm gonna do it?

No; 'cause I had fallen in love with the story of the USS Arizona Memorial, and the fact that both sides of my family were at Pearl Harbor. And I had fallen in love with the ethics of the National Parks Service. There was just no turning back for me. And I was told that if I wanted to be a permanent ranger, because I had come here for that reason, that I needed to go to the law enforcement academy. And I did so; I left here, I went to Santa Rosa, California and went to the sheriff's academy there and became a law enforcement ranger for the

National Parks Service. And on the day of graduation, I got a call from the chief ranger, and he hired me. And that was the beginning of that career, and it was one of those magical moments that I had arrived.

You know, most times, when people do go into history, it's with the idea of teaching it. Getting advanced degrees so they can teach it at the college or higher ed level.

Right.

But that was not your course, and you remained employed in it continuously.

Yeah. You know, the bottom line is that we that engage in this, whether we work in a museum or work for the National Parks or State Parks, we're public historians that have a history field, and we deal with the public. And that in itself defines that we are educators almost at every moment. Because when people come to the national parks, or like to our site, they're there to experience it, and we're there to inform and illustrate why the site is important, and how it fit into the national past.

And at a place like Pearl Harbor, you get more material that you can vet from listening to people.

Right. And we have a story beyond the tragic events of December 7th. Now, we're a World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument. It includes all of the Pacific war.

You know, one of the things I used to love about going to Pearl Harbor, even when I was a young adult, was getting to talk to people, volunteers, who had actually been at Pearl Harbor when the bombing occurred.

Yeah.

Men who had experienced it. Are there any volunteers now who do that? They must be in their nineties.

Yeah, there are. There's one who was a young man. I believe his name is Robert Lee. He lived right in in at Halawa Landing. His home was on the edge of Pearl Harbor, right there in that kind of Aiea Bay right there, and he watched the attack from his second story, on Battleship Row.

Wow.

But we're talking about individuals in their nineties, and that is our fading resource.

Because before, the survivors would walk you around briskly.

I know; don't you miss those days?

And tell you this, and tell you that. But they must have more limited circumference these days.

Well, I was a volunteer and the parks coordinator in 1987, 88. And I had over twenty-five Pearl Harbor survivors that volunteered through the week. And it's just amazing that we have seen since that time, you know, the passing of a generation. There's also the other group that's right here, the civilian eyewitnesses, and those that worked at Pearl Harbor or the airfields, or at home. The biggest connection we made with the civilian community here, and I'm very proud of it because it was a movement to make sure all of the casualties recorded, were the civilian casualties. And at the time, to get those records was very difficult, because they were held by the Health Department here. Mayor Fasi, God bless him, he paved the way for us to get their records. They didn't want to release them to us. We got all the civilian records, death records.

Of the civilians who were killed, I think it came out later that much of that was from friendly fire.

Right.

Honolulu was defending itself.

We found out two things, that it was actually forty-eight civilians. Later, we'd find one more, forty-nine civilians were killed in the attack. Most of them, almost eighty-five, eighty-six percent killed by friendly fire, and the definition of friendly fire, which is a strange term for it, was that as we were firing up at the planes, the shells were either not being fused properly, or faulty, and they were landing all over Honolulu, Waikiki area. And when that happened, many of the people believed they were being bombed. Remember, the planes were still flying over. That's what my mother remembers; the houses being bombed and it was friendly fire coming down.

You know, there are so many myths about Pearl Harbor, including some I grew up with. Some of them were dispelled after I attended school in Hawaii. And I know of them was, you know, the Japanese planes didn't come through Kolekole Pass to get to Pearl Harbor.

I know.

I thought that for years, and I'd drive by those mountains and think, Oh, that's right where the planes came in.

Yeah.

No.

That myth had some truth to it. And that's one of the things I found out in doing some of the research about, was eyewitnesses watching the attack, in particular on Wheeler and Schofield, in that area, saw the planes. But the planes were turning at the base of the mountains, not flying through it. And the Japanese were always kind of, when I interviewed them, Why do they think we would do that? Because the main strike force flew down from Kaena Point, all the way, and turned over Makakilo, and then broke up in their attacks at Hickam and Pearl Harbor, and Ewa. One group came down the center of the island over Haleiwa, and moved up and attacked Wheeler Field, but they circled around. And so, film kind of endorsed that; the book and film From Here to Eternity somewhat endorsed that myth. Then tour guides caught onto it, and then it became part of the story, and they took people out there to Kolekole Pass. Now, the pass itself is historic, but the film Tora! Tora! Tora!, you see them flying right through the pass. So, Hollywood in many, many ways instills and certifies, and embosses some of our myths.

So, something that happened all those decades ago is still a moving target in terms of learning about it and memorializing it.

I'll tell you, Leslie; the more you know, the less you know. And that's been my case. You know, everybody says, Oh, you're one of the experts on Pearl Harbor. And you know, I think what I could say safely is, I know where to find it, but it's just an evolution still occurring. So, long after I leave my position, there'll be someone that will find more history and more angles of that. And that's been my case. Every time I go to work, there's going to be something that's new.

Teaching visitors about history is an important part of Daniel Martinez's job. But there are other aspects of his work that go beyond uncovering new facts and correcting misconceptions. There is the ongoing story of the consequences and the lessons of that even today continue to inform us and affect our lives.

One of the things that I've been blessed with is, I'm the interment officer for what takes place on the Arizona. To see how the Navy, or in the case if it's a

Marine, how they honor and work with us on that ceremony, and when the families come there, and I take the urn down, and the family members are with me, and then I turn that urn over to the family member that's appointed by the rest to do that, and then that person gives it to the diver ... that is a moment.

You've gotten to meet so many of the survivors of Pearl Harbor attack. And you know, many have come over the years, some have volunteered here, some have moved here. And you've conducted oral history interviews with a lot of them. So, I just wonder; for those who went through those horrific times, I mean, they saw their fellow soldiers and other professionals, they saw such terrible carnage. What were their lives like after surviving this?

After the war, no matter what horrific circumstance they went through, whether they witnessed people being killed, or wounded themselves, or nearly killed themselves, they wanted to move on with their lives. Think about it; many of them were young. I did my first oral history with my grandfather, and he agreed to do it, but he wasn't wild about it. And I couldn't understand it. So, I started the interview and I had a little recording machine, you know, and microphone. And I get into the whole Pearl Harbor stuff, and he gets up in the interview and walks away. And he said, That's it, that's it; that's all. And my grandmother, you can hear in the background saying, No, no, go back. You know. He got up, I think, three times and walked away. It wasn't 'til I started doing oral history interviews on my own in the late 80s that I understood what I was dealing with. He had never told anybody about it. And he had seen a young Hawaiian boy that worked on his crew wounded. He had to dive for cover, because he was in the area of Merry Point Landing. That was ground zero for the torpedo attack; they flew right up that channel. And so, he was seeing things and remembering things that he had not talked about. And as a result, he was reliving it.

I see.

And I didn't know that. And so, I couldn't understand at that time, and it took several years for me to get from the university here that I was going into an area of his remembrance that was extremely difficult, and he was reliving it. And he remembered the Arizona exploding, but he didn't know it was the Arizona; he just saw a ship explode and the concussion rocked them there. And he remembered that he stayed there as a Navy federal worker, pulling bodies out of Aiea Bay and placing them on the landing in Aiea for identification, and never got over how young the faces were. And he remembered going through a darkened and panicked Downtown Honolulu, and seeing people and behavior that he never had seen before. People were frightened, and they were scared, and they were running lights, and they were driving up to the sidewalks. And he just said it was crazy. And nobody remembers or really talks

about that, but it indeed happened. And so, when he got home late at night, we were now under martial law and it was blackout. And they huddled in their home in Kaimuki, like so many others did, not knowing what the next day would bring, sensing there would be Japanese soldiers in their front yard. And that was just the beginning of the martial law experience in Hawaii that, fortunately for my family, they were lucky enough to leave, although sadly, and be in a place where there was a lot more freedom. So, for the people of Hawaii, I mean, they're often not really congratulated for their own sustainability and courage and effort in the war effort, just sustaining themselves under martial law. And so, the one thing that my grandfather witnessed that he couldn't believe also was, and I tell the story now to a lot of visitors, is that after the attack, suddenly the workers that were of Japanese ancestry were being attacked and called names by local people that worked on the project. Which just seems crazy. But it was crazy. And so, it got to such a point there were fights, and the inability for crews to work together, and ethnic groups from Hawaii now even that had been their friends were no longer their friends. So, the crews were segregated; there was a Japanese American crew. This went on for several months, and then as feeling subsided—

Yeah; fear is a terrible thing. It drives bad behavior.

We see it. Yeah; and it drove some bad behavior. But it was one of those untold stories that he mentions on his interview, and in doing so, gave me glimpse of the kind of fear, as you say, sustained itself in the weeks and months after Pearl Harbor.

We learn the human experience of history and war through the testimonies of witnesses and survivors. Daniel Martinez's passion for gathering and perpetuating these stories keeps them alive, so we can heal from the emotional wounds of the past and understand history. Mahalo to Daniel Martinez of Kapolei for teaching us through stories. And mahalo to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou.

For audio and written transcripts of all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit PBSHawaii.org. To download free podcasts of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, go the Apple iTunes Store or visit PBSHawaii.org.

I remember we were making a film about Pearl Harbor on September 11, 2001. We were in Washington, D.C., not more than fifteen miles away from the Pentagon. And these suits come in, and he leans over and said, We just got Pearl Harbored in New York. And that's going on while we're having ...

While you are remembering Pearl Harbor.

While we're remembering Pearl Harbor. We were ushered out; we could see the smoke coming up from the Pentagon.

Did you stay in the building?

They kept us there, and they moved us into the cafeteria lobby area, and we watched the second plane go in. It was profound, because we were scheduled to fly that day on Flight 77, the plane that went into the Pentagon. But the reservation was changed. It's never been lost on me that I had a second chance in life, and ... so, September 11th is, I guess, my touch with a Pearl Harbor-like event.

[END]