

**HAWAII AS HOME**

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***Aloha mai kakou.* I'm Leslie Wilcox. In this special edition of Long Story Short, we celebrate Hawaii ... our home. We look back on conversations with Hawaiian language professor Puakea Nogelmeier, educator Ku Kahakalau, cultural consultant Kepa Maly, bank executive Corbett Kalama, grocery store executive Derek Kurisu, and choral conductor Nola Nahulu. Stories of Hawaii as Home, next on Long Story Short.**

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

**We begin with a story from Puakea Nogelmeier, a leading Hawaiian language scholar. You might recognize him as the voice of The Bus on Oahu. Born Marvin Nogelmeier in Minnesota, he set out on a post-high school adventure. Hawaii was only supposed to be a stopover on the way to Japan, but Hawaii is where he stayed.**

Lost my wallet in the San Diego airport. So we had driven cross country, gone to San Diego, we had an airline ticket to as far as Honolulu. I would pick up a passport here. I don't even have a license, I don't have a birth certificate, no money really. I had my plane ticket. Came to Honolulu, had to call and say, Okay, you know, big adventure, I already blew it, lost my wallet. You know, Mom.

**Send money. [CHUCKLE]**

Yeah, Mom, get me a birth certificate. The money came first, birth certificate took probably a month. By the time the birth certificate came, it just seemed there was no rush to get to Japan. So, put that off, and put that off.

**Why did you decide to stay? I mean, what happened in that month?**

Oh; from the airport, we ended up going out, we stayed at Makua Beach.

**How did you find your way to Makua Beach from the airport?**

The two kids I'm traveling with actually knew people here. There was a Minnesota house at Makua Beach. A lot of that was Vietnam War folks, you know, guys who had come back. They weren't ready to go back to the states, and a whole bunch of folks ended up out there. So, we end up in this handmade little *nadas* in Makua Beach. I lived there for three months. Maybe

the nicest three months of my life, really. Just blissful ignorance. I didn't read a newspaper, I didn't think about anything, just wandered along, enjoyed water, enjoyed sand. [CHUCKLE] And I guess, they would have thought of this as homeless, although it's really the most organized homeless that I'd ever seen. They were full houses, fully equipped.

**And this is right on the edge of the beach?**

Right on the edge of the sand, up against the *keawe* trees and the *haole koa*. I mean, it was really a remarkable place. There were probably fifty people. The Minnesota *hooch* had two bedrooms. Two like formal [INDISTINCT] and a bunk bed. It was made out of plywood, made out of leftovers that were found all over the place. Kept very tidy, actually. Full kitchen setup, dishes, everything. It's not exactly the way the homeless are running today. It did fall into decline by the late 70s. They were doing cleanups, and should have, it had gotten pretty ... just a lot of rubbish. But it was actually tidy, nice place to be. The beach was pristine. Stayed there for three months. I actually got an infection on my foot and had to go to the hospital. They would not let me out of the hospital if I didn't have a residence, so I ended up moving into Makaha, moved in with friends in Makaha.

**Puakea Nogelmeier confesses that his first means of support in Hawaii was living off his unemployment checks. Then, he linked up with a community of artists in Waianae, and became a goldsmith.**

Oh; that was my career. That was something I could do for the rest of my life. And I've not done it now for thirty years. But who would have thought? One of my co-craftspersons was Mililani Allen, who became my *kumu hula*. She did beautiful silk batik with Hawaiian motifs, and just beautiful things. But one day, she was talking about, Well, I'm teaching *hula*. We didn't know she taught *hula*. I want to open a men's class, but guys are so gun shy they won't take it. And so, we pretty much said, We should open your class, we'll take your class. Would you? Okay; so now, we're all committed. So, her class of men started up with a motley crew of craftspeople. They were not dancers.

**What was the name of the *halau*?**

Halau Hula O Mililani. [CHUCKLE] Which, that was her name. She had been teaching maybe two years. She had graduated from Maiki Aiu Lake, she had been teaching women. It's very formal *halau* structure. Classes run for an hour, once a week, et cetera, et cetera. So, she opens the men's class. We're all dummies. We don't know anything. I didn't know any Hawaiian history. I didn't know Hawaii had a kingdom or kings, or I didn't even know they had a language. I came as an empty calabash. And I'd been here for a while, but I learned Waianae stuff, not necessarily Hawaii stuff. So, we step into class, and it's just a doorway to a whole new world I didn't know was there.

**Speaking of a whole new world, our next guest, educator Ku Kahakalau, grew up half a world away. Jazz music was on the rise in Europe in the 60s, so Ku's musician father moved the family to Germany. Ku did her best to adapt, but in her heart, she knew she wanted to return to Hawaii, back home.**

We spent several years in Europe, and my father really, really liked it there. He liked the part that they took good care of the environment there, he liked the part that a handshake and a promise really meant something, and he liked the part that when they did things, they did it the right way, or they did it at a level of sophistication and rigor that our Hawaiian *kupuna* also did things. And so, he saw many things that were very similar they way people acted in Europe, compared to how his Hawaiian *kupuna* taught him.

**You know, it just occurs to me that you must have been around people who didn't realize you're Native Hawaiian.**

Definitely. That would be something that not anybody figures out right away. [CHUCKLE] And that's perfectly fine, because I know who I am, and ... the way we grew up, I mean, people never really knew who we were in the first place. And I always felt people have to accept you for who you are, no matter what nationality you are, what ethnic background, or what your IQ is. And so, I haven't had a big problem with that, actually. I'm proud of my German heritage, I still practice some of those pieces, or at least don't deny that or don't want to have anything to do with it. But my dad was the only Brown person in town when we first got there, and it was not easy, even though we physically would fit in. But when your last name is Kahakalau no matter what, you can't hide that.

**And that was the reason you didn't fit in? It was the name and the Brown father?**

It was the color of it, but then also, my father's very unconventional lifestyle certainly didn't help either. All the other fathers worked every day from whatever it was, eight to five kind of a thing, and my father never had a regular work schedule in his entire life. So, I think those things certainly didn't help either. And so, we just always felt a little bit odd. And then, as we got older, we met so many military people that were stationed in Germany, and I worked for the military for one year after high school to make money to come home. And the more we sang the songs, and the more we tried to eat the food it became like, What am I doing here?

**So, when you hit high school graduation, at that point, you were making money to get home.**

Yes.

**No question?**

No question. That was one of those single-minded decisions and without any concrete plans as to where to go from there. There was no doubt in my mind. As soon as I had enough money for an airplane ticket and a couple more thousand dollars that could hold me over for a little while, I was gonna come home. And I did.

**For cultural historian Kepa Maly, Lanai is home. Growing up, he immersed himself in stories about Lanai from his hanai, or adoptive parents, Tutu Papa Daniel Kaopuiki and Tutu Mama Hattie Kaenaokalani Kaopuiki. As a gift for Tutu Papa and Mama's seventy-fifth wedding anniversary, Kepa wrote a song based on those stories from his childhood.**

A stronger section of the verse, a softer section of the verse being Tutu Papa and Tutu Mama, who always covered him. Gave him that softer, you know, those qualities that made life easier. And recently, woke up crack of dawn with these words in my mind and this melody. And it was celebrating story of places of Kaa Ahupuaa, which is the northwestern end of the Island of Lana'i, Keahiakawelo, where you and I visited. The quote, unquote, Garden of the Gods. And the very point is Kaena, the beach, this miles along of white sand beach, Palihua, cove of eggs, because the turtles nested there. And that's celebrated in one of the few ancient *mele* of Lana'i for the Pele migration, where Pele, you know [CHANTS]. Calling, [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE] is Pele. She wears a garland of *ieie* that is woven for her. As the lines of the *mele* go on, it describes that Pele eats of the turtles of Polihua. It was okay back then, because it was in their cultural context, yes? And, it talks about these places, though, and about standing on top of Kanepuu and looking up to the heights of Lana'i Hale. And you can see the cloud layer going down like a garland at Maunalei, which means Mountain Garland. So the song speaks of some of those famous places.

[UKULELE/SINGING-HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE]

Now, we're gonna go up to Kanepuu and look up to Lana'i Hale. We were there.

[UKULELE/SINGING-HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE]

The last line of the song is nine verses, so I'm not gonna do 'em all.

[UKULELE/SINGING-HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE]

So the last line says, These are among the storied places of Lana'i which is beloved and set there in the calm. And this comes from Tutu folks, their stories, the stories, the traditions that are handed down. And so, we need to keep people connected to this beauty. It's all that we have that no one else has.

**Our next guest learned about the importance of keeping connected with family and community at a young age. Corbett Kalama, the Kamehameha Schools trustee and First Hawaiian Bank executive vice president, grew up in Kailua, Oahu, which he calls a playground. And growing up with ten siblings, Corbett never ran out of playmates. Including Corbett and his parents, the Kalamas were a family of thirteen. The family home was a one-bedroom, nine hundred square foot house. With a large family came certain responsibilities.**

One important responsibility was, the oldest sibling was responsible for the younger ones. That's automatic. The other thing was to make sure we took care of our clothes. Right, because we knew that our siblings would have to use the clothes, especially those of us who were going to St. Anthony's grade school; they were uniforms. So we were very careful. Where kids would be scraping their knees and tearing the pants, for example, we couldn't afford to do that. Right? We had to do that.

**Because you were thinking of the next kid.**

Thinking of the next kid. We'd help my mom wash clothes. We had an old washing machine, the old scrub type thing, and wring it out, put the clothes into a big pan with starch. Starch it, and then we'd do the ironing and different things. But we did whatever we could do. We never had, as a child, a lot of apples and those types of things, so in retrospect, it was probably very healthy for us, because we'd go into the mountains, we'd pick guavas and mangoes, and mountain apple, and lychee, and just everything there, and mangoes in the tree. And you learned to pick enough. We'd sell mangoes, we'd do different things. There was a golf course nearby when we moved over to Kailua, Mid Pac Golf Course. It wasn't unusual, I loved tournament days, I'd sit out there in my tin canoe, and a foursome would come by, at least two would be in the water. Dive in with scoop net and my goggles, and either try and sell it back to them, or else I'd sell it up at the country club. Just trying to make ends meet and to help my parents take care of all of us that way.

**Was that something your parents told you, you should be doing?**

No, no; we just realized. You know, love runs deep and different things, and we shared everything that we had. My father shared all the knowledge that he had, we spent a lot of time in the ocean. We lived a lot off the ocean. I don't necessarily go out of my way to eat lobster or those types of things anymore, because it was right there in our front yard. But we learned the right way to pick lobster and not to damage the hole. We were very, very protective of sustainability, as they talk about it today. But we learned that way, so we all had to pull our load.

**What was the fishing out Kailua way like then, compared to now?**

Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Kailua Reef used to be like an aquarium. You had every type of fish that you could think of. There was white coral; you could go just a little further outside that, deep enough to where you'd see a lot of black coral that was there. There were lobster holes everywhere in Kailua. You could walk right from the sand into the water, and find a lobster hole, octopus holes. It wasn't unusual for us to take that small island off Kailua Beach is called Popoia Island, they refer to it as Flat Island. But we'd go out there, and we'd go surfing. It wasn't unusual where we'd just take a bottle of water, some matches, and we'd hide an old refrigerator grill, and then we'd junk and po at about lunchtime to see who was gonna go in the water to pick slipper lobster. We'd go out there, and it was two apiece. One person would have to dive in the water and pick it, and that's how we lived. We'd go out there and do that. So

we had a park that was there. We were windsurfing before there was windsurfing.

**Did you see other people taking too much? Was there some kind of a neighborhood—**

As a child, no, you never saw that. The neighborhood was very, very protective of each other. So even when you went fishing, you went to visit the other families to make sure that they had enough food too. So it wasn't unusual. But see, with that responsibility, they also had the responsibility of the discipline aspect of it. So no, it wasn't unusual, it wasn't unusual for the neighborhood kids to just sleep on the beach as a group. It wasn't unusual to be sleeping at someone's house, and know that everybody was okay.

**When you have something, you always share.**

You share it. You share it. And it worked out, and kids talk about that. Now they're all adults or grandparents, they talk about coming to our house when we were youngsters. And my dad, at a very young age, even though we lived in that small house, it wasn't unusual for him to go around and pick up the homeless in those days that were in Kailua, and bring them home to our house.

**I think that's so true that so often, it's the people who have less who give more.**

M-hm.

**Do you find that?**

I still see that. And I think it's just finding the opportunity for those that do have to help connect them to the group. 'Cause, a lot of the work that I do in the community now, it's not for a lack of desire on the part of individuals that are a little better off than others, but it's trying to make that connection.

**Hilo's Derek Kurisu also knows the importance of connections and community. He and his siblings, including younger brother Duane Kurisu, the entrepreneur, were raised in plantation communities on the Big Island. There, Derek saw for himself how everyone pitched in to help their neighbors. The value of collaboration continues as he serves as executive vice president at KTA Superstores, Hawaii Island's locally owned grocery chain.**

The great thing about living on a plantation, there were so many great people; right? And everybody had some kind of strength. And the key, too, is that you know, people in their different strength area would help each other. For instance, your car break down, a mechanic would come and fix it; right?

**And he wouldn't charge you?**

Oh, he wouldn't charge you.

**But what would you do for him?**

Oh, no, and if you went fishing, you had fish, you'll bring fish over to the home. So a plantation family wasn't just made of five or ten people; it was thousand, it was family of families. And that's what made it so great living on the sugar plantation. I have an older brother. His name is Hervy.

**Hervy.**

And for him, I mean, when I look at him [CHUCKLE], he reminds me of these plantation men. They're so kind, sincere inside and then, if they're your friend, they'll just do whatever it is to make something happen. Lot of these plantation guys, they wouldn't tell you anything. But you'll learn a lot from them just by looking at them, by observing, by watching. 'Cause they don't say stuff. Let me give you one story. Okay. I used to enjoy going bodysurfing, swimming, and all that, as a youngster. We used to make our own body board, right? And I never had one, so I used to go bodysurfing. And one of these plantation men told me, Eh, Derek, tomorrow after work, I'll come and I'll get you something. We used to make our own body board, right? And I never had one, so I used to go bodysurfing. And one of these plantation men told me, Eh, Derek, tomorrow after work, I'll come and I'll get you something. So I said, Okay. So all my friends went surfing, and I went down to the gym. I was waiting for that man. He got through—came out of his truck, told me to follow him home. So I went down to his house, and there, I saw this big table. And I looked at the table. I go, Ho! And it was like those ply board, a thick one like that. And I can still remember being under that house. Then he told me, Oh, Derek, draw your surfboard on this thing. So I drew my surfboard on his nice table. Then he grabbed a saw, he cut it. He made for me one board. That's the plantation kinda thing, yeah?

**Yeah.**

Then he put on the skegs for me, and he said, Come back tomorrow, I'm gonna go and waterproof the thing. But that is what it was all about. You know, I think why I was real fortunate, that I had a great-grandmother. And she used to live up close to the forest line of Hakalau. All of our families, my aunties, uncles, and my grandparents used to gather at my great-grandmother's house every week, at least once. Used to get about forty or fifty of us. And I think for myself and my brothers, we have learned a lot of the values, the cultures things and also traditions from that. And we have also learned, and they always used to remind us, to make sure not to bring shame to the family. [CHUCKLE] And I think that ingrained in each one of us. They really took care of us, they gave us everything. Met all our needs, our life was very simple. And I still tell myself, Wow, I better make sure I'm on the right path. I guess for me, that was like the foundation of my life.

**Seeing yourself as part of something larger.**

Oh, larger. So whatever I do now, I know if I do something bad, it's a reflection not only me. All my families, all my ancestors, all my friends that helped me out, KTA Superstores where I work, all of the employees gets affected. And you know what? To me, that is very, very important. I try to make sure that I don't go and upset anybody or make any enemies. And I guess this whole thing about an obligation to the family or to the organization or whatever you belong to helped me keep a straight life, and motivated me to move ahead.

**For over three decades, Nola Nahulu has brought out the best in Hawaii singers of all ages. In this next clip, the respected conductor shares some of her earliest memories as a Japanese-Hawaiian girl on Oahu's Waianae Coast.**

My sister and I went to Waianae Elementary School. And to date us, that's because there was no Makaha Elementary School at the time. My parents would wake us up in Makaha, we would drop off at our *Obachan's* house, 'cause she lived right across the street. Then the routine was, go *Obachan's* house, have breakfast, go school ... go back to *Obachan's* house, have guava ice cake that she would have made. And then, go to Japanese school.

**Where was Japanese school?**

Japanese school was at the Waianae Hongwanji. And everybody went. Sometimes, we even got to ride our bikes there. And for those now, in this day and age, it's right behind the McDonald's in Waianae. But at that time, it was an open-air theater. Waianae town had two theaters; one regular theater house that was covered, and the other one that was open-air.

**Was it a drive-in theater?**

No, it wasn't a drive-in; there was just no roof. And there were seats, wooden seats, and the screen.

**Wow.**

Yeah. And around fourth, fifth grade, we had the opportunity to take piano lessons. I keep on saying we, because my sister and I got afforded the same opportunities. So, we took piano.

**Did you take piano because it was a good thing to do, or because you had a yearning, desire to take piano?**

You know, our parents said, Do you want to take piano? And we said, Yes.

**Really? Because I said, No. I had no desire to take piano when I was a kid.**

We had nothing to gauge against. It was an opportunity that came up, and there was a piano teacher that moved into Waianae, and so they asked. And we were, Yeah, okay. And then, we actually got a piano. And we know that was a big sacrifice. But one day, a piano showed up in our house, and we know that our parents invested in that. So we got to take piano.

**What was your parents' background?**

Dad's from Nanakuli. Well, Nanakuli via Lualualei, via Laie.

**Okay.**

And my mom's Waianae, plantation. My grandmother, my maternal grandmother was a picture bride. So she came over early 1900s as a picture bride.

**So your mom was Japanese. Was your dad full Hawaiian?**

Yeah, he's full Hawaiian. And my mom's *Hiroshima-ken*.

**How many Hawaiian-Japanese families were there around you?**

Not many.

**Not a common combination back then.**

Not a common combination. It is an odd combination.



**Was there any feeling between sides of the family?**

Well, I know at first, the Japanese were very concerned about my mother marrying a Hawaiian. Of course, you need to realize, the Hawaiian-Japanese combination is pretty cute when they're babies. And we were the first two grandchildren, so it seemed to work. We never felt any kind of resistance being brought up. We were always cared for, and loved, and ...

**Did you grow up with a sense of, as many part-Hawaiians do now, you know, I have to learn my Hawaiian culture, my Hawaiian values?**

No. And let me say no, because we were learning them. It wasn't like I needed to learn them. Both sides, Hawaiian and Japanese, we were learning the culture from our family and from community activities. And we were learning who we are. I didn't have to say, I am Hawaiian, or I am Japanese.

**You didn't have to choose?**

No. To this day, I'm both. I'm *keiki o ka aina*, I'm from Hawaii.

**Thank you to Nola Nahulu, Derek Kurisu, Corbett Kalama, Kepa Maly, Ku Kahakalau, and Puakea Nogelmeier for sharing personal stories about home in Hawaii Nei. On behalf of PBS Hawaii, and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.**

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit [pbshawaii.org](http://pbshawaii.org).