

**GUEST: BOB SEVEY (2 of 2)**

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**Aloha no and mahalo for joining me for another edition of *Long Story Short*. I'm Leslie Wilcox – about an hour outside of Seattle – at the home of former longtime Hawaii news anchor Bob Sevey. Last time, in our exclusive, two-part interview with the former KGMB News Director and Anchor, Bob Sevey told us that he has inoperable cancer. And he explained that he did not “retire” from the news business in 1986 – he actually “resigned.” Here’s how he described the scene in the newsroom: a producer called for Sevey and co-anchor Linda Coble to lead to a “live shot” at a rather unremarkable fire at a small tire shop – for the third time in the same newscast.**

The floor director relayed the message that we're going back to Goo's Golden Tire Shop again at the end of the broadcast. And I said, 'No, we're not.' Linda got down and crawled under the anchor desk and ran into the control room to tell them, 'No, we're not.' Well, the word was, 'Yes, we are.' The news director and the producer were both in accord; they were in the control room. We came back, and we had a monitor on a hydraulic lift. And all of a sudden, I heard the whir, and the monitor came up, and there was a picture of Goo's Golden Tire Shop, and the smoke

**Meaning you as an anchor, you'd better talk about it, 'cause it's right there next to your head.**

And I did my fifteen seconds of weather, and said goodnight.

**And you were steaming.**

I was quite unhappy. But not as unhappy as were the news director and the producer, who were all over me like a bad rash. And the next day, I was summoned to the general manager's office, and told that the producer was the final authority on the six o'clock broadcast, and I'd better understand that or else. And I explained that I had been the final authority on that broadcast for the last twenty years, we'd done fairly well, and no, I'm not going to accept that. And he made what I considered to be a threat, that I'd better, or else. So I went back and sat down, and wrote out my resignation, posted it on the board with two weeks notice. And uh, my last day was July 4, 1986 — twenty years to the day.

**Independence Day.**

Independence Day; yeah. And uh, and I'm kinda sorry that it ended that way. Well we, we played it for the public as retirement. And it was; so it wasn't, that wasn't totally dishonest. But that's what happened.

**He took a stand and took his leave. Mounting pressure from corporate owners and news consultants had come to a head for Sevey in 1986.**

**How do you think consultants took away from the public, in terms of what they needed to know? I mean, that's what the news is supposed to do – tell you what's going on with your government, with your business, just let you know what's happening. How did the consultants take away from that?**

Well they were all over us because we had beat reporters. You don't need beat reporters. We had people who covered City Hall on a regular basis, State government on a regular basis.

**And broke stories all the time.**

And broke stories all the time. We had a judicial reporter, we had an educational reporter. They wanted me to get rid of that, because the operative phrase is, 'If it bleeds, it leads.' So we gotta be ready to cover the serious traffic accidents, the fires, the murders, the near murders, the assaults, the batteries – and I just couldn't understand that.

**M-hm. Do you think an anchor needs to be a journalist?**

No, I don't. I think it is – I think it's a plus if the anchor has been a journalist. Um, I was never technically a journalist. I mean, I was a broadcaster; that's what I started doing from the minute I got out of the Army and started in college, I started in radio as a broadcaster. And I was exposed to news. But uh, I was never a beat reporter, per se. Um, I think it helps if the anchor is a journalist, particularly on occasions when uh well, something spectacularly catastrophic happens, like a Kennedy assassination or a 9-11. I think journalist background might be helpful to the anchor at that point. But for day-in and day-out broadcasting, I think communication is the secret.

**You talked about how television news started as a loss leader, a public service, something for the image of the station — and then became very profitable and very important and you —**

It's now a cash cow; yes. Yeah.

**And do you think the fact that it is so lucrative is what is leading to its demise in quality?**

Well, I think they've gone hand-in-hand. And I have a problem watching television news now.

**What do you see that really turns you off?**

Formulaic news. Lead stories invariably are accidents, fires, murders – no matter what else is going on. I don't see much going

on in the way of beat reporting at all, and I live in the state capital of Washington. They may send somebody down here from time to time when the legislature is in session, or the governor is gonna do something, but I don't see reporters living a beat.

**And why is that important?**

Well, government's kind of important to us. It sort of regulates almost everything we do. We pay them a lot of money in taxes.

**They churn out a lot of press releases to inform us.**

Yeah.

**You're saying that's not enough?**

I don't think that's quite enough. No; the, the press releases tend to be just a skooshi self serving. And good reporting tends to wring a little bit of truth out of what isn't in the press release. At least that's been my experience. There seems to be a – I don't know; a kind of a robotic feel to it. Never mind that in many place now the cameras are robots. And the human touch, I guess, is what I miss. I keep thinking, 'Is there anybody in the control room there listening to what's going on? Does anybody hear what that reporter or that anchor just said, because they made a really bad mistake.' I never see anybody correct anything. Our rule was, if we make a mistake, we will correct it in this newscast if possible; if not, in the next newscast for sure. I want the anchor to say, 'Boy, we, we got a real mess here; uh, hang on just a sec. What's going on, Charley? Uh, assuming there is a Charley there in the studio. We used to have a studio director. I guess they must still have one. But everybody just sort of sits there kind of dumbfounded, and the screen goes black, and then generally a series of commercials comes up.

**But what's the point of television news now? Do you think it still is a public trust? Are we thought of it as a higher calling and a sacred trust. I don't think the public now considers it that watching the fare that we give them.**

This is probably very unfair for me to say. But for an awful lot of people who are now in television news, I think it's a job. It's what they do.

**And so many things are beyond their control; they just deal with things and do what they can in their little piece of the 'aina?**

Yeah. M-hm. And do you know whose name I've gone this far and not mentioned as being an alumnus of whom I am so proud I could cry? Joe Moore, for heaven's sake. How could I overlook that?

**Exactly. Well, I was gonna ask you about Joe Moore. Joe Moore was gonna come up, no matter what, because he —** Oh, he destroyed me.

**He became the leading anchor in Hawaii, and has maintained his hold for so long.**

Yes, he did. Yes.

**And he came out of your newsroom.**

Yeah. And, and during the last — oh, my last year, or maybe even two — he was beating us in the six o'clock ratings.

**That must have felt horrible to you, because you'd been the leader so long, and so high up.**

It wasn't the high point of my life, but I — you know, I understood — because I had always felt that Joe — I never thought of Joe as being a journalist with a capital J. But boy, was he a communicator. And to the credit of the people that owned Channel 2 at that time, they took him from us to do sports. Somebody figured out, 'Hey, this guy, if he can do sports that well, there's no reason he can't do news.' And so they switched him to news anchor.

**Joe Moore has expressed some of the same feelings on the air, as you have been saying in this conversation.**

**Corporate owners from other shores and consultants.**

I understand he's been rather outspoken about that sort of thing, and I'm not surprised, knowing Joe. And I know how he feels.

**And my guess is he's had the same as — and worse — than you experienced in 1986.**

Oh, I think worse.

**And he chooses to continue.**

I think worse. He has seen the news staff just riddled in terms of number of reporters and that sort of thing. And I think it's too bad. He chooses to continue. Uh probably, if I'd been smart, I would have too. Because I would have been far ahead financially. If you quit, and you're under contract, that's it.

**You can't compete against the people you have the contract with.**

And you can't compete. And yeah, and so I don't blame Joe for continuing to work. And he's doing well, and he's surviving all of the slings and arrows that now come at you when you're in television news.

**Well, I remember your goodbye, the tearful — at least, least for those watching, tearful goodbye at Channel 9. You were retiring earlier than anyone expected you to, including yourself, as you explained. What were your thoughts then?**

**Were you asking yourself what was next, or did you know?**

I had no idea. I just knew that we were gonna get out of town that night. And we did. We took a redeye and I think we were gone for about two weeks. And by the time we got back, all the hubbub had pretty much died down. And I didn't really have a retirement plan, because it happened, as you say, a lot more abruptly than I had thought it would. And I think we just sort of let it happen. Rosalie and I did some traveling, which we wanted to do. And then we moved to Washington.

*((Selected highlights from Bob Sevey's farewell message — KGMB News 07/04/86))*

On July 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, when I first sat down at the KGMB news desk, I had no idea I'd still be here 20 years later. ... This job has given me the opportunity to meet and to know so many good people — newsmakers, news reporters and you the news viewers who have kept me in business night after night here at the same old stand. ... And for my part I've tried to be honest with you,

to let you know what was happening without letting you know what I thought about it. I wasn't always successful in that either. But it was my goal; because that is what I think this job is all about. Now, for me, this job is done. And I have been amazed and overwhelmed at the reaction to my retirement announcement. My colleagues and my competitors in the news business have written and said so many nice things – especially the fella who does the same sort of work a few notches up the TV dial – Thanks, Joe. ... Thanks too, to all of you who've been so thoughtful these last few days – for the leis and the bouquets and the baskets and the bottles and the letters and the calls and the good wishes. ... My two heroes in this business, Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite had signatures. And I'd never been able to develop one. Murrow said, "Good night and good luck;" and Walter said, "And that's the way it is." And I think I'll leave you tonight with a few lines of a song not too many people know – I'm not going to sing it, don't worry. It goes back to the late 40's in radio when the late Meredith Wilson wrote it as a theme for an NBC Radio Show called, *The Big Show*. ... "May your troubles all be small ones and your fortunes ten times ten. May the good Lord bless and keep you until we meet again. Good night."

**You did so well in Hawaii, you had so many friends, you had so many people cheering you on no matter what you chose to do. Why did you decide to leave the place where you'd found so much success, your home for so many years, where you raised your two boys?**

Well, for one thing, when you retire, particularly if you retire early, you don't have anybody to play with. All you know, all the guys I liked to play golf with, they had to work. And it's no fun playing golf all by yourself. Um, and Hawaii was changing. We're in the mid-80s now, the Japanese believe that their economy is bulletproof, and they're coming into Hawaii and buying everything in sight, not just for the asking price, but asking price plus a little more. So prices are rather going out of sight. Traffic is beginning to be very bothersome. H-1 is no longer a parking lot during rush hour, it's a parking lot; period. And I don't know that there was anyone — I'm sure that Rosalie and I never sat down and said, 'Okay, we're going to move away from here.' It just didn't happen.

**When you think of retirement, you think of, you know, planning the retirement. You didn't really get to do that, because of the, the circumstances at Channel 9 at that time. And when you hit retirement, and you find a way to enjoy life, something else will always coming knocking. And now, retirement is about enjoying life, but it's also about holding onto life.**

Well, yeah. And, and so far, we've done both. Rosalie uh, unfortunately, came down with Alzheimer's. And so that put a pretty severe restriction on our ability to do things together; to travel and that sort of thing. But you know, just try to make the best of it. Then this cancer thing came along. But I haven't found that to be terribly, you know, much of a handicap. I mean, it's just a fact of life. And it'll get me someday, but it ain't got me yet, and so as long as it doesn't have me, I'll keep on doing. I'll keep on keeping on.

**You say doctors tell you this, that and the other. But sometimes the choices, the options you have aren't enough.**

Well, I try to get them to explain as in language I can understand. Okay; what does this do? What's the potential? What's the best thing that can happen, and what's the worst thing that can happen? And then make the decision.

**You've done very well with chemotherapy. You haven't had a lot of adverse effect.**

No; just, just the hair loss. No other side effects, whatsoever. And that's from two different formulas — actually, three different formulas. And so far, it's been duck soup.

**So do you read all the material, the literature, the research you can about it? How involved are you in this process?**

I read as much as I can, to the point that I can understand it. And a lot of it is in medical gobbledegook that I can't understand, and that's where I count on my oncologist, who is an absolutely marvelous guy; patience of Job, speaks in plain, ordinary English that you can understand, listens, asks questions, answers questions. And he's my anchor to windward. I mean I, if he said, 'Now, what'll really cure your cancer is if you go jump off the Golden Gate Bridge,' I'm on the next bus to San Francisco. Yeah.

**You really are the anchor of your home now. Rosalie needs help with decision making and constant care.**

Yeah.

**And you, you're fighting this, to some extent, by yourself.**

Well, by myself – but, there are three ladies who work for me, work for us; they're caregivers. And they work shifts; there's one of them here every day, twenty-four/seven. Without them, I think Rosalie and I would both be either in the Happy Academy or a cemetery. They are that important to us.

**Are they here to take care of her?**

Take care of her. It's a full-time job.

**So that's, and that's a huge burden from you. Otherwise, you would be —**

Yeah. They, they've all expressed a willingness to pitch in and help if this whole cancer business begins to be a problem. I figure we'll face all that when it happens. And I am so grateful to them that you know – knock wood – it's just working fine.

**Do you think of that every day, that this — you know, who knows?**

No.

**Everyone can say, 'This could be my last day, this could be my last year.' Nobody ever knows.**

Sure.

**But do you consciously think if that every day?**

No I don't. I don't think about it. I mean, when you go in for chemo and they poke a hole in you, and you sit there for three hours

while the chemicals drip in you, it tends to get your attention. But other than that, no I don't – partly because I feel good. I really don't feel bad at all.

**And do you ask the doctor, Okay, now how long — based on what I, how I'm doing now, how long do you think?**

Oh, yeah, I do that about once a year. And as I say, the first year, he gave me a year, thirteen months ago. Now, he's given me up another year. And a year from now, we'll see what the next prediction is.

**Yeah; you can go year by year.**

Yeah. And heck, you know; it's not like I'm a kid anymore. I've already outlived the what, the average age now is seventy-seven years and six months; something like that. I've got that beat by two and a half years.

**You have a chance to do things now that —**

I play golf as often as the law will allow. I mean, I play what, what I say is golf, as opposed to what golfers think of as golf. But yeah; I do that regularly.

**You've reorganized your life around your health and certainly Rosalie's health.**

Pretty much, pretty much; yeah. I haven't restricted myself very much because I haven't found that I needed to. Folks who used to play golf with me in Hawaii will be pleased to learn that I'm not only no better than I used to be, but I've actually gotten worse.

**And don't care.**

Yeah. Well, you know, when you get older, you just don't hit the ball as far. And so I guess that's a good thing; instead of slicing it a hundred and fifty yard out of bounds, it only goes a hundred yards out of bounds. But yeah; I still very much enjoy — I have some problems with my legs, with the circulation, so walking particularly on hills — and our golf course has some hills — is difficult. But because I'm old and infirm, they let me put a flag on my cart. If you've got a flag on your cart, you can drive on the fairways when the other folks can't, you see? So I'm hanging in there.

**What do you think about mortality? I mean, it should be part of every day life, because nobody guarantees you any tomorrow.**

Absolutely. I feel if the cancer doesn't get me, something else will. I don't think about it that much. I suppose when the time comes, that the cancer starts making the decisions instead of me, I'll be given pause and we'll start thinking a good deal more about mortality. But when I'm in no pain, when I feel no effects, I just am not gonna worry too much about it. I've done my very best, I think, to get my affairs, whatever they may be, in order, so that the kids know what's supposed to happen. And got a good lawyer, a good accountant and a really good stockbroker. And with those three guys on my side, I'm, I'm pretty happy.

**Bob, you reported on many people's deaths, and you wrote obituaries. How do you want yours to read?**

Well, first of all, given what newspapers charge per word for obituaries these days, I'd just as soon not have one.

**They have the free ones too.**

Do they have free ones?

**They have free ones.**

Maybe I could get them to put it in the Honolulu papers instead of over here. There are no free ones over here. I don't know; I haven't even thought about it. 'He did the best he could.' I guess that kinda sums it up. Um, 'He won some, he lost some, and a few ended in ties.'

**Do you carry regrets with you at all?**

Well, yeah. I regret that I was never a starting catcher for the New York Yankees. I was never a navy carrier pilot. And there are probably some decisions that I made, particularly in the news business, that were really dumb. I try to put those out of my mind. But by and large, I'm fairly content with what's happened in the last almost eighty years. But yeah, you know, I guess, well, aside from my greatest regret, which is that my father wasn't the richest man in the world and left everything to me so I never had to work, um, I'm pretty content with the way things turned out.

**As a News Director, Bob Sevey was no talking head. He put his whole being into leading a hard-charging newsroom — so that viewers could have straightforward, accurate information about things that mattered. Not fluff, not stories by formula — real news. You can see why his former colleagues still call him 'Captain.' Mahalo Captain and thank you for joining us for another edition of *Long Story Short*. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou.**

We had — I had — and then I think through me the rest of our news department had — we had a very good relationship with CBS News. In those days, Walter Cronkite, the president of CBS News Richard Salant, producers like Don Hewitt of 60 Minutes and correspondents like Dan Rather — they spent a lot of time in our backyard because during the Vietnam War every time you turned around there was a president and a prime minister and a bunch of admirals and generals and secretaries of this and that coming for palm tree summit meetings. And we were just constantly in a state of uproar of network producers coming in to use our facilities to feed the satellite and our editing facilities and so forth. Um, I like to think that some of what was then the quality of CBS News sort of rubbed off on us. I felt an affinity for Walter, very much so, and was very aware that I was coming on the air right after him.