

GUEST: SENATOR INOUE 1

LSS 119 (LENGTH: 26:32)

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Aloha no. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. Mahalo for joining me for another **L S S**. Many people want the ear of Hawaii senior Senator Daniel Inouye. He's one of the most powerful people on Capitol Hill, influencing policy and money decisions. I'd like to have a few words with him as well, but for a change, I don't necessarily want to hear what he's accomplished and or what he plans to do. I want to get a better sense of who he is.

Senator Daniel Inouye is 84 as I speak. And his objectives are different from most people his age. Still hard at work, he's ambitious for Hawaii and for himself and he wants to climb to the next rung on the career ladder. At this taping, he's looking to rise even higher in seniority and power in the Senate. And he's eager to become a bridegroom on May 24, 2008. That's his wedding date with Irene Hirano of Los Angeles. Our conversation begins with a story from 1959.

I've tried to identify with what it was like when you went to Capitol Hill in '59, representing Hawaii. And because I've just had a little taste of that since I've attended national conferences in this PBS job. When I say where I'm from, I see people's eyes glaze over. In other words, you're from this insignificant, isolated place, you don't matter in the power grid, and they move on. Did that happen to you when hit The Hill? That was a lot longer ago.

Not exactly. As I said, I was lucky. I was in my office; this bare room, no books, all by myself, no secretary. And the phone rings. I pick it up; Hello. And the voice on the other end says, I can't pronounce your name, but are you the new Congressman from Hawaiya? I said, Yes, sir. I'm the Speaker.

Sam Rayburn?

Yeah. He said, If you got free time, come around; I'd like to chat with you. I'll be there, sir. Boom. I had no idea there was a tunnel or subway; I just got out. And this was in August; hot, hot, hot. I ran across the field, walked up the stairs. There he was. He took me on a tour of the House, told me where he sits, where I would very likely sit. Took me to a barber shop and said, We don't pay these fellows enough, so tip 'em 25 cents. This is the bank, this is all over the place. Then, we got back to his office. He's sitting down, majestic, baldheaded. I'm on the other end. And he says, In this city, the President is the best known person. I said, Yes, sir. Next to the President is the Speaker of the House; that's me. Next to me is you.

H-m?

I said, Sir? He said, Well, after all, there are not too many one-armed Japs around here. [chuckle]

And you didn't get offended?

No, I didn't get offended. And I said, Oh, thank you. So, he said, make the most of it. And he was very good to me.

So he said, emphasize your differences.

Yeah. I was on the table, the Texas table. So when I got in, I sat down with the ...

M-hm.

The reason for this, very likely, was the fact that the 442 rescued the Lost Battalion, the Texas—

The National Guard guys.

Yeah.

Wow. So that, that was it, the Lost—

See, everything—

--Battalion connection.

--happens like that. And he was good to me.

Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn represented the state of Texas whose 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Division – originally the Texas National Guard – became known as The Lost Battalion. During a storied World War II battle, 211 Texans were rescued from German bombardment in a forest in France. The rescuers were from the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and 100th Battalion which suffered terrible casualties reaching the Texans. The young Dan Inouye well remembers the day America was thrust into the war at Pearl Harbor.

When you were 17 years old, I think it was three months after you turned 17, you began to grow up in a very big way, because Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Yes. It was a difficult time. I can't forget this moment. On the 7th, we were preparing to go to church; Sunday. And I'm getting myself groomed up with a necktie; once a week, I wear a tie. And I'm listening to music and the disc jockey is just saying, And next, we have this and this. All of a sudden, he started screaming. Pearl Harbor is being bombed? The Japs are bombing Pearl

Harbor! It's not an exercise, it's not an ex—and kept on doing this. I thought it was some kind of Orson Welles job. So I went out on the street, looked towards Pearl Harbor, and poof-poof-poof. I ran in, said, Papa, come out here. He looked at that, and all of a sudden, three planes flew right overhead, returning from the run. Gray; red dots.

You knew right away what it was?

I knew that the world had come to an end; my world. At least, I thought so.

What'd you do right after that?

Then, I got in the house, I undressed, put on my work clothes, because I was then a member of the civil defense aid station. And I knew very well that they'd be calling me, and I wanted to be ready. So instead of waiting, I took my bike and left. And told my parents if they call, tell them I'm on my way.

What was it like when you got there?

Well, when I got there, it was just chaotic. Because just prior to that, the anti-aircraft shells somehow landed in McCully. See, oftentimes, when they put the shells into the gun, you put a timer on so that it would explode at 1,500 feet or 2,000 feet, or 3,000 feet. In this case, somebody forgot to put the timer. So about six of 'em landed in McCully, causing casualties; about ten died. And so I was very busy from the moment I got there. You know where McCully Chop Suey is; King and McCully? Across the street used to be a drugstore with a soda fountain and all that. Now, it's some fancy restaurant there.

Oh, Chef Mavro's.

That's right. That's where; boom-boom-boom, you know.

I'm just wondering if you could channel back to your early childhood in Mo'ili'iili, living on Bingham Tract, and tell me what your life was like. What street did you live on?

Well first, I lived on Hausten Street; no longer exists. The house, if you will call it that, was located across The Willows.

Which is now a parking lot.

Yes. And I did go to The Willows, because The Willows had been owned by a couple, a very wealthy couple, with no children, and they went to St. Mary's Mission, oh about three or four blocks down the road and adopted two twins, a pair. And I used to go to St. Mary's Church, so I'd get invited there. The pool in The Willows is an artesian well. And we used to swim there all the time. Further down the street, there were taro patches; we called them pake patches; and get chased out all the time, because we're going for the juicy shoots. It was a great life. Went to Washington Intermediate, and then McKinley High School. And war came along.

It's well-known that Senator Inouye joined the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, lost an arm fighting in the European Theatre, and became a decorated war hero. He received rehabilitation services far beyond what most of our Iraq War veterans are getting. And he had no doubt about the need for that World War.

It was a great experience. I would never give it up. As people ask me, Knowing what you know now, would you go back again? Absolutely. Many of us felt terrible that your neighbors might feel that we are unpatriotic, un-American. Because couple of weeks after the 7th, we were all declared to be enemy alien. And it was 4C. 4F is physically unfit; 4C is enemy alien. We had no idea about the internment camps in Hawaii. We just noted certain people disappeared, but we had no idea where they were headed for. But the bulk of us all remained in Hawaii and we petitioned the White House; Please let us serve. And finally, the first of 1943, Executive was issued, forming this regiment. And I'm happy to tell you that 85% of the eligible Japanese Americans in Hawaii volunteered.

And you became a segregated unit.

Yup. And I was then in my first semester in college; I was in the pre-med club, because I wanted to be a surgeon. And there were thirty-five members in the pre-med club; thirty-three volunteered. And by coincidence, all thirty-three were accepted; not one became a doctor. They were either wounded, killed, or something happened.

At the time you came back from the war, and you'd lost your right arm, did it hurt not to become a surgeon, or were you past that dream? Did you—

Oh, I was—

--want to be a lawyer?

I was past that. It's something psychological. The moment it happens, you know that's out. And some in the system, I don't know how to explain that, because I'm not a psychiatrist, but—

At what point did you decide, I'm not gonna be a surgeon, that's out? What was that point?

The moment I was hit.

I've read your commendation; the description of why you won the Medal of Honor, and you probably didn't write it.

So I want to find out if what it says is really what resonates with you. For one thing, it says you acted with complete disregard for your personal safety. This is as you climbed up this treacherous slope, right by a German emplacement, took it down, and then got up in front of another one and I believe, destroyed that one too with grenades. But did you really act without any regard for your personal safety? Did that all go away?

I'll be very honest with you. Well, there were at least a dozen people watching all of this, I'm certain. Call it what you may; maybe it's temporary insanity. And when I look back, I say, No, I didn't do those things. But I had my responsibilities as the platoon leader. And we had this code in the regiment; Don't expect your men to go up if you're not willing to go up. In the so-

called book, the training book, it's never led by the officer. Patrols go out. Scouts out, or something like that. The leader stays in the back. But in our code, as the boys you would say, You go first, buddy.

Don't ask anyone to do something—

Yeah.

--you're not willing to do yourself.

[chuckle]

So do you have a clear recollection of what happened during that incident?

No. I remember few episodes. There were three machine guns; yes, I remember that. I went for the first, and lucky, the grenade went into the hole, and boom, three guys got knocked out. There was another one, and that one was a little troublesome, because one of the gunners stood up with his rifle, and he fired point-blank, boom.

Shattering your arm.

And that part, I remember very vividly. Because I knew I had the grenade in my hand.

In your right hand?

Yeah. See, I was not a lefty. In fact, my left hand is slightly crooked, as you can see. It was broken when I was young. And so here I am, scrambling, looking for the grenade. I figured it fell. No, it was clenched in my fist.

And you had no movement.

And so I pried it out, and threw it. It went right in; boom.

Did you feel pain at that point? Were you feeling the pain? Your commendation also says that even with your right arm shattered, you kept working; you made sure your troops were in defensive positions until you went for medical aid.

Well, actually, it was a little worse than that. Here, it was bleeding. K-k-k, k-k-k, you know; blood beat. I picked up my gun with my left hand and—it must have been a gruesome sight. Charging up the third one; that's when I got hit in the leg, and I went rolling down. And when I got down there, I started putting on the tourniquet.

Do you think of—at that time—of dying, or just what you have to do?

I think duty and responsibility during the training period got imbued in you. I never thought that I'd be dead.

Because you're very optimistic. I've heard you say you have never been discouraged.

That's right.

Were you not discouraged when you lost your right arm, and you had had these dreams of being a surgeon?

That's momentary.

You spent, what, twenty months, was it, in a hospital?

Twenty-two months.

Twenty-two months in a hospital, recovering.

They gave me something that I'm so sorry to say—the prison—the Iraqi veterans are not getting; rehab.

You're talking about more than physical rehab?

Well, I got all the surgical work, the medical work. I got a prosthetic appliance; they showed me how to use it. But then, they had a whole bunch of volunteers, a very complex program. I had to pass a test on sports. Golf, I flunked; before I finished the third hole, I was ninety-two. So they said, Forget it.

[chuckle]

Swimming; that, you would think, What's the big deal? I'm from Hawaii, Waikiki, I know how to swim. But then, it was not in the hospital pool; it was in a public lake. So I found myself on day one wrapped up with a towel.

Because you're so cold?

No.

Why?

It's human nature; you don't want your ugliness to be shown—

Oh. I see.

--to the public. You, you see eyes piercing you, right? Second time I just draped it over my shoulder.

But you don't use one in regular life now.

Because it's so warm. And the prosthetic appliance I had, you had to put on a stump sock, they call it. Heavy, woolen, and then you shove it into that hole, and strap across here. You perspire all the time. And I figured, as long as I had the muscles here [chuckle], skip that.

So you got through that rehabilitation, just having a comprehensive experience.

Carpentry, electrical work, plumbing, dining. You know, dining is important. As the instructor said, A man prefers steaks; but you got one arm. And the whole class was just one arm. The odds are, you're gonna bypass the steak because you don't want to tell the waitress, Please cut it for me. And especially your girlfriend; you're not gonna ask her, Please cut it for me. So you're gonna deprive yourself. He says, No, I'm gonna teach you to have confidence. You tell the guy, Please cut it; or you tell your wife or your girlfriend, May I have it bite-sized? They'd be happy to do it. See? And uh, little things; even sex.

There was a course on that too?

Yeah. But uh, this is a home program. [chuckle]

So you left after twenty-two months feeling, I know how to handle myself. And—

I used to play the saxophone and clarinet, but that was out of the question. So the instructor said, Why don't you try the piano.

I says, What, are you kidding me? He said, No, try it. I passed the test. My colleagues in the hospital gave me a standing ovation. [chuckle] The twenty-two months—those were glorious days, believe it or not.

Why?

They gave me confidence. I left the hospital full of hope; I can conquer the world.

So here you were, an older college student; you went to school on the GI Bill.

Yeah.

At what point did you decide, I want to be a lawyer now?

In the hospital.

In the hospital?

This may sound strange, but there were two patients; both of them became senators, all about the same time. Phil Hart, a building is named after him, Philip Hart Senate Office Building. I'm in that building. The other patient was Bob Dole, who became Republican leader. And I was the third one. Now, there's a hospital named after all three of us in Battle Creek, Michigan; the hospital we served in. And Bob Dole had his arm shattered, internal injuries; he had been in a blast. And when I saw him, he says, Well, I'll be going soon before you get out of here. What are your plans? And without batting an eye, he said, I'm going to become a county attorney. Oh. And when they open up some seat in the Legislature, I'm gonna run for that, get elected. '59, Hawaii becomes a state; I get in, I get to the Congress. Bob Dole is not yet. I sent him a telegram; Bob, I'm here; where are you? [chuckle]

Dan Inouye beat Bob Dole to Washington. But he almost didn't make it. And especially right now, he'd much rather look forward than look back.

At that point, you had a long life ahead of you. Tell me what your life ahead of you looks like right now, at age 84.

At age 84 I would say that I expect interesting things to happen from now. Well, living with Irene will be interesting in and of itself, even if I weren't in the Senate. But in the Senate, I'm number three.

In seniority.

And the odds are, someday I could be president pro tempore, which is something I'm not working for, because, although constitutionally you're third in line for the presidency. But I'm one step away from the Appropriations Committee. So some day, I may very likely be the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, plus Defense Appropriations Committee. And right now, I was selected as Mr. Pig or Mr. Pork of the Year.

Which are now called earmarks in the—

Earmarks.

--presidential campaign.

And I'm going to fight for it, because the constitution is very clear that the Congress plays a major role in establishing the budget. And all of my programs are transparent, above board, monies for this. This is nothing crooked. I've had some that I had to explain. Now—

So the term earmark has become a bad word—

Oh, evil.

--on Capitol Hill. But it's pork barrel spending, and uh, and you have brought a lot of that home to Hawaii.

If you call it that. East-West Center is earmark. The bridge to Ford Island; when I put that in there, they said, Oh, come on, Dan; what's that for? It's going into a desolate island. That's why it's going there. Now, you're gonna have six hundred fifty family units, a thousand bachelor quarters, home for the special forces, centralized office of NOAA, National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration, we'll have a regular home now for the Missouri. It's going to be a busy island.

So you're gonna continue with earmarks.

Absolutely.

I see.

And now, as chairman of Appropriations, I'm in better shape.

[Chuckle]

[Chuckle]

Senator Daniel Inouye also says he's in great health and great spirits, anticipating marriage to Irene Hirano. He'll share more about that next week as our Long Story Short continues. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. A hui hou kakou.

I see the chaplain moving around. He comes up to me, he says, Son, God loves you. And I said, Yes, I know God loves me; but I'm not ready to see Him yet. He looks at me, he says, You're serious, aren't you? I said, Absolutely; I've got a long life ahead of me. So he called the doctors; Come back. And he whispered a few things, and so they changed the notation. I was scheduled to be dead.

GUEST: SENATOR INOUE 2

LSS 120 (LENGTH: 27:21)

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Aloha no, I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. Welcome to L S S and an opportunity to hear senior U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye share more personal accounts than the stuff of legislative bills, press releases and stump speeches. After all, he's got a date at the altar with Irene Hirano of Los Angeles on May 24, 2008.

Hawaii's senior U.S. Senator, Daniel Ken Inouye is the third-most-senior Senator in our nation's capital. A proud and humble man, Inouye was born to a Japanese immigrant family. His mother was an orphan. His dad relied more on action than words to teach his son.

I've never heard you speak pidgin English; but you were a child of the time, you must have.

I was good at it.

You say you were good. Do you speak pidgin English at all anymore?

I can talk to anyone you want me to. [chuckle]

Do you lapse into it when you're with your pals?

I don't automatically do that, because it's almost insulting. You know, when I'm with you, I speak this language.

M-m.

But if I want to get a point across, and one thing about pidgin; it's a shortcut in many ways, and it gets to the point.

And you can say some things with the right tone that you—

That's right.

--can't really say—

That's right.

--in standard English. But have you always had—you have this wonderful speaking style and a deep voice, and you're kind of formal when I see you. Is that how you always are?

No, as a child I was not husky or tough. But my father made it up by trying to give me, as you say, inner strength, you know, to be confident of yourself and don't go out and pick fights, because you won't win. You know. [chuckle]

So how do you develop inner strength? What did he advise?

Well, he taught me a few things. For example, I asked him a question. I said, Boys Day, they fly those carps.

[chuckle]

I said, Why do they do that on Boys Day, a fish? Why not a sword or a helmet or something, you know. And he wasn't a very talkative man. He said, Come with me, Ken. And he got one of those tubs, the kind of washing tubs, burlap bag, a rope, put it in the back seat, and we went to Chinatown. And at some of the Chinese stores, they were selling live carp. It's in a little box, live ones flapping around. So he filled the tub with some water, about six inches, and he bought one, and he struggled, got wet while the fish is just shaking all over the place. And he finally got it in the pail, covered it up with the burlap bag, tied, and carried it in. Got home, and he took it out of the car and put it on the counter, kitchen counter. He says, Now, watch. Takes off the burlap bag, the fish is flapping around. He has a cutting board and a knife; he takes the fish, he puts it on the cutting board after flapping and all. Once he puts it off, he takes his hand away, and the fish is lying, not moving. Then he puts two fingers on the head, and with the knife—k-k-k. And the fish is not struggling. He cuts it, pours salt on it, and the parts shake. This fish fights for his life. For once he knows that he is defeated, he dies with grace and honor. What can I say?

I've heard you say that you were very fortunate to have had a good family. And I'm wondering if you can tell us about your parents.

Well, my mother was an orphan at the age of four. Her mother died at childbirth, so she never met her mother. They were plantation workers in Lahaina; lived in the village of Pu'uukoli. And when she found herself an orphan at four, one neighbor would take her in for two weeks, another one for another two weeks. About a month later, a young Hawaiian couple came by; native Hawaiians. And they inquired; Where is the Kepani girl? And they pointed out my mother. And they just, without fanfare, took her hand and said, Come home with us. And she lived with that family for a year, until the Methodist pastor at Lahaina learned about this young girl living with Hawaiians, and his attitude was, orphans belong in orphanages. So he went up, and no one would ever think of opposing a minister of the church. So he just took her, and shipped her off to Suzanna Wesley Home. Well, that period in her life had a great impact on her. To her dying day, she spoke Hawaiian, and she always made it very clear to me that she owed a great debt of gratitude to the Hawaiians, but you're in a position to do good on that. And that's one of the reasons I'm so involved in Hawaiian matters. But she was very devout to the Hawaiians.

So she didn't really have a mom, but she was your mom. What—what was your family life like?

Well—another chapter. At Suzanna Wesley Home, she got there on a Wednesday. On a Sunday afternoon, the bishop of the church or the superintendent goes around the city inspecting facilities—old folks' home, old ladies' home—and came to these Asian orphan girls. And they're all lined up with white crinoline dresses and white stockings. My mother had nothing like that; she had just arrived. And he'd go down the line, and he would say Oh, good afternoon, Sara. And she would curtsy. And what would you like, Sara? And Sara would say, May I have a piece of candy? And the assistant would give her candy. Finally came to my mother, and she's at the end of the line; a little thing. This fellow is 6' 6". My mother must have been about three feet high. So he's looking down, and he says, Bob, we have someone new; what's your name? Kame. And what would you like? A home. And he took her home.

What did she call him? And did he have a wife?

Oh, yes; Dr. Kleinfelder.

Uh-huh.

His name was Daniel B. Kleinfelder. And so she became a devout Methodist. Women's Christian Temperance Union; and no beer or any liquor in the house, no smoking whatsoever. If someone came in—and most Japanese men smoked—she would say, Would you go out and smoke?

So she ended up having a regular home life after.

And Reverend Kleinfelder gave her away at the wedding, because my father's family was incensed that he would marry a Christian, on top of that an orphan. [chuckle] So they didn't attend the wedding.

Oh.

Can you imagine that?

It's different times. So what were the two like together; your dad and your mom?

Oh, they were wonderful. My mother used to always tell me, and my father would say, M-hm, m-hm. He wanted a date to take her to lunch. And my mother, in her sweet voice, said, Oh, I'd love to go to lunch with you, but first, you get baptized. [chuckle] That's the rule of the house, you know.

Did your dad—was he old school, didn't really say much, led by example, or did he sit you down for talks about, you know, Son, here's what I'd like to see, here's what's important?

He was a busy fellow. He was the eldest of the elders; sixth generation, and I'm the seventh. So he spent much of his time preparing me for clan leadership.

Clan leadership?

Yeah. [chuckle] See, my grandfather was the eldest. His son, my father, was the eldest; and I'm the eldest of seven generations. And in the village, Fukuoka, that meant a lot.

So you were gonna be a leader of some kind.

Of the family. [chuckle]

What do you find out about human nature during combat? Which many people will never experience, and never understand.

Number one, all of us are afraid. If you're not, something's wrong with you. Number two, we're constantly thinking about the folks at home; girlfriend, or what have you. But number three, in our case, it was something else. I can't speak for the non-Japanese; maybe they're the same. The morning, early morning that we were supposed to attack for the first time in our career, cross the lines of departure at six-thirty in the morning. You know it's, the clock is ticking. So here I am with my squad; I'm the assistant squad leader. And I said, Can I ask all of you a question? They said, Go ahead. I said, What were you thinking about last night? Because today, some of us may not come back; some of us may get hurt. And all of them gave me the same answer, in different ways. Such as, I hope I don't bring shame, you know, I don't want to be a coward. And a few would say, I don't want to dishonor my family or my country. But it was all the same thing.

Did you feel that way as well?

Oh, absolutely.

After he returned to Honolulu after the War, young Dan went to college on the GI Bill and met his future first wife, Maggie Awamura, at the head of the class.

She was an educated woman. In 1947, she had an undergraduate degree from UH and she'd gone to New York's Columbia University as well for a masters.

In those days, it was a rare thing. When I came back to resume my studies, freshman class—I finished one semester, so I'm still a freshman. She was an instructor here. [chuckle]

So the teacher was dating a student in the school.

Absolutely. And when we got married, just before we got married, she was preparing for her doctorate, you know. And I thought, Well, she wants to stay here. She said, Absolutely not; I'm your wife, I'm gonna be with you.

Was it love at first sight?

I saw her in a parking lot, where Hawaiian Village is now. There used to be a little house, old house where a combo used to play, a jazz combo. And I was getting into the parking space to go home, and here she was in a car, sitting in the car. And a friend of mine said, Dan, I want you to meet my girlfriend.

Uh-oh. [chuckle]

And I knew him very well. I said, I'd love to. And he brought me, and she was sitting in the car, looks out. I looked at her and I said to myself, Ed, you just lost her. [chuckle]

I take it you and he were not good friends after that.

No, he understood. See, what had happened, uh Maggie was prepared to attract a good man. There were six girls in the family. Her father was the last in line; Awamura. After him, the line ends.

Oh.

So she had to learn how to dance, play a Japanese musical instrument, koto.

M-hm.

Tea ceremony, flower arrangement, cooking, sewing. This was the traditional way to prepare yourself. Five families had submitted bids, nakodo, saying that, I represent a certain family, and this family has a son who'd like to meet your daughter. And arrangements were made, and that was one of the nights. Okay.

And then she meets you in the parking lot.

Yeah, well, I was drunk. [chuckle] Barefoot. Because it was after the Thanksgiving game at the University of Hawaii, and you know, I'm dressed like one of the students. So I waited a couple of days, and I called her. I says, I don't think you remember me. She says, Oh, yes, I do.

[chuckle]

I said, Well, this weekend the officers of the regiment are having a Thanksgiving party, and I'd be most honored if I can take you there. Certainly. Wow.

Tell me why. Did she ever share with you why she picked you?

Because, as we made eye contact, she knew I was it for her.

And vice versa?

Yeah. And so took her to Fort Shafter; we danced, ate, took her home. Not kissing or anything. Closest was cheek-to-cheek dancing. And the last word I said was, May I see you again? And all the girls should know this. She smiled; she said, Perhaps.

Got you going, didn't it?

Oh, my god. I couldn't sleep. I didn't know what she meant by, perhaps. So I called her again. I said, I'd like to have dinner with you, just the two of us. Love to. December the 6th at Kewalo Inn—and in those days, Kewalo Inn had an open sky.

So you picked—

Danced under the sky.

--a romantic place—

Oh, gee.

--obviously. [chuckle]

Danced a few. And then Ala Moana Park is right down the street. So drove in there, I parked. I still remember there was a torch fisherman out there. No words were exchanged. And I looked at her, she looked at me, and I said, Will you marry me?

Did you plan that ahead of time?

Uh, no.

Oh.

Flat-out. I expected her to say, Isn't this a bit sudden?, or something like that. She looked at me; she says, I'd be happy and honored and pleased.

What happened to perhaps? [chuckle]

So I said, Let's go home.

[chuckle]

I took her home. Didn't even shake her hand, and didn't kiss her goodnight.

So you'd never kissed her at the time you proposed?

That's right. Took her home; I went home. And my mother was in the living room; she had finished her chores of the day, reading the paper. She looked up at me; she says, Did you fight? I said, No. What happened? I proposed. Then she put the paper down and she says, And what was her answer? That she'd love to be my wife. Boom; she fainted. [chuckle] I had to slap her.

[chuckle]

She got up again, she said—

[chuckle]

--What did she say? She would take me. And like a good Methodist, the next thing that came out of her mouth; We'll have to take her to church.

I know your wife was a—

[chuckle]

--Methodist. Is that—

No.

--because of your mom?

She was Congregationalist.

Oh, became Methodist?

Oh, yes.

Oh, I see.

[chuckle]

Dan and Maggie Inouye were married for nearly 57 years and raised a son, Daniel Ken Inouye, Jr. In March of 2006, Maggie Inouye died of cancer.

You know, the greatest moment with Maggie was ten days before she died. I've never said this publicly. Imagine; she's in the hospital. And I've got my bed nearby, because I spent the last three weeks in the hospital with her. And that night, my son was there, and she said, Tell Kenny to go home. And he spends couple hours, and then he goes home. He was there for about an hour. So I said, Kenny, why don't you go home. Oh, I don't want to go home. Please; Mother wants you to go home. Oh. So I get back to her, and she—What's up? She says, I'll be dead in ten days. Just like that. I said, Really? Yup. I've told the doctor not to give me any injection on food or whatever, just to—liquid, and pain killers. So I should be unconscious in about seven days; but in ten days, I'll be gone. So, she says, we'll have to make plans. She said, I'd like to have these memorial services at Harris. Not in Washington, but Harris. I said, Fine. And I want the three hymns; she named the hymns. No paper, but she's got it all here. I don't want you to give the eulogy. I said, I plan to. She says, No, because you'll break down. Then who should we select? Our son. I think he's ready. You know. So he's gonna give the eulogy. And then she says, um, I would love to be buried with you, because she said, I know that you're gonna be buried at Punchbowl; I want to be buried with you there. I said, Certainly. Sure? Certainly. It's a promise? Yes. Then she started laughing; chuckling, you know. I says, What's so funny about this? She said, Don't you know the rule? You can be buried with only one wife. [chuckle] I said, Yes; that's fine. But it doesn't mean you can't get married; but I sleep with you.

So essentially, she gave you her permission and s—support.

Then she said, the last things were, I hope you'll mourn for me for six months. Oh, absolutely. I told her, I'll mourn for you for the rest of my life. She says, No, no, no; that's not healthy. After six months, find a companion because I spoiled you. You just don't know how to live alone.

M-m.

That was Maggie.

And it's true, isn't it, that many men who've had good marriages want to continue that. That's the lifestyle they enjoy, and you—

M-hm.

--probably—did you get very lonely soon after?

Oh, god. It was—

I mean, you're busy all the time, but ...

Like my cleaning woman; you know, I got a cleaning woman now.

M-hm.

She looks at the bed; she says, This side is clean, this side is—why don't you get a single bed? I said, I'm getting ready for—

M-hm. [chuckle]

Now, more than two years later, Dan Inouye is marrying Irene Hirano, who resides for now in Los Angeles. How'd they get to know each other? Around the conference table of the Japanese American National Museum in L.A. She, the President and CEO. He, chairman of the museum's board of governors.

So your life changed when you saw Irene in a different way.

The relationship was business; I'd go to the meetings four times a year, and that's about it. I'd see her four times a year, and ... Hello, Irene. But after I became a widower, I looked at her a little differently. Let's have dinner together. M-m. That's it.

So she said, M-hm? [chuckle] Could tell the nature of the relationship had changed? I mean, was that obvious to her, or did she say, Well, is this a business lunch, or you know, or—

No.

She knew there was interest?

I think she did. And she approved.

She has turned in her resignation as CEO—

Up until then, I—

--of the museum.

--I didn't have dinner with her. It's always at a dinner with the board.

M-hm.

Or dinner with the whole museum, or something like that.

And was there a time when you had that kind of connection of the kind you had with Maggie, where you knew—each of you knew?

Oh, yes.

Was it early on?

Pretty early. Where you don't have to say, but the message comes across.

I would think you're a really tough guy to marry. I mean, you're always traveling, you're always busy.

So it takes a special woman. [chuckle]

And I see that you like good looking, highly educated, strong, and gracious women. Is that correct?

That's about it.

[chuckle] Anything else?

Oh, she has to love me, naturally.

M-hm.

And one that I'm able to love.

M-hm.

I've been lucky. If you look at my life, throughout my life, at every juncture, something has happened.

As we can see, much has happened during Dan Inouye's life. And as we talked weeks before his wedding, the distinguished senator seemed almost a little giddy. Being in love can do that. Mahalo to Senator Daniel K. Inouye – and to you – for joining me for another Long Story Short. Please continue to visit our website and send us suggestions for future guests. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. A hui hou kakou.

Can I just ask you one thing?

Yup.

When I'm in Washington, I hear people say your name, and they always say, Ino-way, even people who know you really well. Do you want to say, It's Inouye?

[chuckle] I never correct them.

Never? Doesn't it bug you, just a little bit?

No.

I mean, in Washington, that's your name.

I know they're calling me. Ino-way, Inaya. [chuckle]

As long as they are talking with you, right?

Yeah.

Or about you.

M-hm.