

**GUEST: "BOOGIE" KAHILIHWA**

LSS 311

FIRST AIR DATE: 10/14/09

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**As a boy he had no say, no choice. He was sent to live in Kalaupapa. A place where so many had been sent to die.**

**As a man, he had the opportunity to leave this place with a history of suffering and untimely deaths. But that's not how he viewed his home.**

**While the past regards this spit of land on the North Shore of Moloka'i as a place where so many went unwillingly, this man saw it as a place for Hawaiians to go and be Hawaiian... a place to enjoy the bounty of the land and sea, in the bosom of a loving community. He chose to stay in Kalaupapa. Meet Clarence "Boogie" Kahilihiwa, next, on Long Story Short.**

**Aloha Mai Kakou, I'm Leslie Wilcox. In this edition of Long Story Short, you'll meet a man who chose to live his life in a place that so many others before him had yearned to leave. Instead, Clarence "Boogie" Kahilihiwa, found happiness and a fulfilled life in the isolated settlement of Kalaupapa, Moloka'i. This is where, for 100 years, those who were found to carry the dreaded Hansen's Disease—leprosy—were sent to live and die. By the time Boogie was diagnosed at the age of eight, many Hansen's Disease patients were living at the Hale Mohalu facility in Pearl City, Oahu. But Boogie's long story short starts on Hawaii Island in his hometown which would later be overrun by lava from Kilauea volcano.**

Well, this happened back in Kalapana in 1949. And they had this district— they used to have district nurses. And Dr. Hitchcock, which was the doctor at Hale Mohalu at that time, she was there, and two of her aides. And I had a brother and sister. I had two sisters in here, my brother, and an uncle, way back in 1934. I didn't see one sister; she died in 1942. But I used to ask my

mother, who was this, who was this boy in this picture? That's your brother and your sister. But I was one small kid that time, it didn't ...

**You don't remember them being sent to Kalaupapa?**

I don't remember, no. So in 1949, when they took a [INDISTINCT]. I don't know what—I forgot where. But I had a rosy blemish over here or something. And [CLEARS THROAT] ... couple weeks later, the nurse came back again, and she talked to my mother. And then when they left, my mother said, Well, you gotta go to Honolulu. You see?

**Was your mom worried?**

Yeah; she knew all about it already. But ... to me, I feel, wow, I'm gonna ride a plane.

**But did your mom know at that point, that when you get sent to Honolulu—**

Yes, she did, she did.

**—you probably won't come back?**

Yeah.

**Because you go to the receiving center, and that's where they process you?**

Yeah, and everything was all right, since it didn't bother me when I went to Hale Mohalu. But the thing was, when I stepped into Hale Mohalu, I couldn't go back out. Then I knew, oh—

**Did you actually get diagnosed?**

Yes, I did. Yeah.

**And how old were you?**

I was about nine. Yeah.

**So—**

Or maybe I was eight in '49.

**Was there a lot of worry on your part, on your family's part, that you were going away to be checked out for a blemish, and—**

No, I think—

**When your sister and brother went, they didn't come back, they went into—**

I think it was more on my mom's side. And in fact, I was kinda happy that I was in Honolulu. Because, Honolulu was a different island to me, and it didn't bother me, really, that I was separated at that time, until maybe about two, three days. Then when my mom them left me there, and then they came back short while afterwards, maybe about a month they came back to Honolulu. And that's when I really saw my mother crying. But ...

**And you were the third child she had lost to isolation.**

I was the fourth.

**Fourth child.**

Fourth; yeah.

**So at that point, you were living in Hale Mohalu in Pearl City. Didn't they have a fence around it?**

Oh, shucks. [chuckle] To me, look like one prison. You remember that picture, Stalag 17, I think was. They got the fence up like this, and they got the barbed wire this way. But ... even then, I made friends easily.

**Were there other kids your age, nine years old?**

No, Norbert came in not too long afterwards. Then another week, couple. In fact, three more came in, and in fact, when I went to Hale Mohalu, it looked like they just moved into Hale Mohalu not too long ago. And of course, the way I heard it, they said they about 1949, I think was. And so a short while I was there, maybe my mom them left. I stayed there about ... maybe a month. Then my sister and my brother-in-law came down here. Then I don't know what happened. My brother-in-law stayed in Honolulu with me. After a while, I came up here. And we rode on the [INDISTINCT] airline. It was a four-seater. Similar to Kamaka Air type airplane, but it was you know, a four-seater. And uh, there wasn't any airport.

**Did anybody tell you, you're going there, and it's in effect a death sentence, there is no cure, people get terribly sick, and—**

No, not when I was young.

**—you'll never come back?**

[CLEARS THROAT] No, no. Not when I was young. Because I knew I was coming here to see my sister and my brother. And I knew I was going back.

**Boogie Kahilihiwa lived at a time when Hansen's Disease patients were treated very paternally by the State. Their care was shifted from the old Kalihi Hospital to a new facility at Hale Mohalu. There, he met patients who became activists, like Bernard Punika'ia, Henry Nalaelua, and Richard Marks.**

Then I met some good people, good people. I mean, they're all gone, we have to carry on their dreams. That's what I feel today. In the case of Bernard, and you get people like Henry, you get people like Richard Marks, or people who died earlier, a long time ago. All our age, they died young. They died maybe about twenty-two, twenty-four.

**Did they die of Hansen's Disease?**

No, not really actually. But I think because of Hansen's Disease, the complications—

**M-m.**

—becomes uh, worse.

**I see.**

You know.

**Okay; so you're at Hale Mohalu, and you're deciding whether you should go to Kalaupapa. You're telling me you weren't banished to Kalaupapa, you decided to move here.**

Well [CLEARS THROAT], I knew I had a brother and sister, and they wanted—

I'm not saying the authorities didn't want me to come up here—It's the patients themselves didn't want me to come. Some of our own people said, Don't go there, and I said, Well ... I have a brother and sister here, and then good thing I came up here. And then I really got down to learning about Father Damien, and although I heard about him too at Hale Mohalu, around the time we used to come up here.

**What was it like meeting your brother and sister that you'd only seen in pictures before?**

Well, I didn't believe that was my brother when I first saw him. And—well, he took the—, You know, I'm the big brother, and so anything I did, he scolded me. And then I said, Oh, okay, okay. But he got his own gang, their own clique, so I don't mingle with them too much. So ...

**How about your sister?**

Oh, no after we come up here, my brother-in-law and I, I don't know what happened, but we stayed at my sister's house. And they had a fight. Well anyway, long story short, we moved out, and then I moved back. Then afterwards, when I came back to Kalaupapa again, I stayed with my friend's mom.

**So—**

He and I used to come up every time.

**So you came here for your sister and brother, but that didn't really work out as ... they didn't feel like family so much.**

Well, my brother was staying at the Bayview Home. And was packed. Bayview Home was packed. Over here had, oh, so many people.

**How many people were here when you came?**

When the first time I came here, I would say about ... over five hundred.

**Patients?**

Patients.

**And now, fewer than twenty at this day in—**

Patients.

**—2009.**

I would say over. But those days, people was dying too, see? When you hear the bell, you know who's that.

**What was it like living here? When you were a kid, what was it like?**

Was all right. Nobody tell me what for do. We go down the beach, no fences around. Only thing, we have to be home at a certain time. There was a little bit—little control on... don't stay up late, and we have to need our nap in the afternoons. Was good. I like it. I met a lot of good people.

**Was there a lot of sickness?**

Yeah, there were a lot of people really ... I mean ... a lot of them at that time had... kidney problems, heart failures. Lot of them was blind. We had a lot of blind people, blind patients.

**Did that make you afraid of what was ahead for you?**

No, I didn't think that way. In fact, some of them became very good friends, and they began to tell us stories about their time, like Steven Dawson. I think you heard of him.

**M-hm.**

And he used to tell us stories. Well, they listened to this...they used have the uh, talking book. Remember that?

**Yeah, I remember the talking books.**

For the blinds. And I mean, I'm only listening, I can imagine. They put us to sleep. All these stories, he told us the story of the Mohicans and Lewis and Clark ... before I ever read the book.

**A master storyteller.**

Yeah; it was one of the people I met there.

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**While many of the waters of these islands have suffered terribly from over fishing, the remote point of land that is Kalaupapa, Moloka'i has a well-stocked fishery. Boogie Kahilihiwa says it's because the people of Kalaupapa practice Hawaiian ways and maintain a sustainable harvest.**

**Tell me about fishing. That's what all of us from Honolulu want to hear about. 'Cause we heard you're the master fisherman of—**

No—

**—Kalaupapa.**

No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

**And we haven't seen the kind of fish resources you have here in our depleted waters.**

I know that. I was up at topside not too long ago for the sustainable meeting. And they have a good idea about keeping Moloka'i, Moloka'i. And I see, during the summer months, especially when April-May, you have about seven boats over here, you have about eight boats in the back. And lot of these boats all come from Honolulu or Maui. What they do is, they come with their big boat, then send in two small boats. And for this side, you can see they only going pound opihi or whatever; dive. The other side, some guys going hunt, some guys going in the river because I see that in Honolulu. What you call that ... the river opihi ... they call 'em hihiwai. It's not openly sold, but they sell 'em in Honolulu. And it's all on Moloka'i. And they're ripping off our island over here. It's too bad, they cannot control. I like the national park, where maybe off limits at this time, let 'em replenish and ...

**Which has a cultural background, at least for—**

Yeah.

**—Hawaii.**

Because in the Hawaiian system, I think they did the same too. Well, this place is kapu, and then just like cattle, yeah? You let 'em grow and let this

other side grow, let 'em graze on this side. But the fishing, I tell you, boy. Let them go. I tell you, the fishing ground over here was really immaculate. Even 'til now. That's our icebox, so we go and then you take what you want.

**What do you get out there?**

Not what you can.

**Not what you can.**

No.

**Because you can—**

You take what you want, and not what you can.

**And you've been fishing these waters since you were a kid. Can you tell me a little bit about what the fishing was like then, what it's like now?**

Well, that time, was really plentiful. I mean moi. I mean, the old folks, you gotta listen to the old folks. Go catch me some moi, and you just go. I mean you know where all the fishes stay, so ...

**You fish from shore?**

Yeah, from shore. And then later on, we go on the boat. Yeah, we used to have a group of guys, and we all put two dollar every month, and just to buy rubbers, like that, for diving. Then what we do—mostly I did was—pounding opihi, diving.

**How big are the opihi? Well, how big were they, how big are they? Opihi.**

Oh, I don't see the bigger ones now. And we don't pick up the real big ones. Just about, I would say about three inches. Sometimes get more. But those are the mamas, we call. Those are the ones at low tide then you can see them. But we don't pick that up. I mean, that's the grandpa, the grandmamas, and that's how we all have all our baby opihis come up. But fishing, I think that's all we could do, fishing and hunting. And then later on, people got boats, then everybody, Eh, I think maybe I can get one boat too. And the first thing you know, we making crab, Kona crab.

**How about lobsters?**

Lobsters all right. But I rather have Kona crab.

**[chuckle] And did you catch ulua, big ulua?**

Not really big. Uh, in the medium range, maybe about forty pounds.

**Change is coming to Kalaupapa, and it's just over the horizon. Before the National Park Service takes over entirely from the State Department of Health, it's a longtime goal of Boogie Kahilihiwa and many other patients to create a monument to the thousands who lived, and died, on the peninsula.**

I think our struggle right now, for me, being the president of the Ka Ohana ... we have a nonprofit organization. We're looking to establish a monument in Kalaupapa. And so our group, our team is a little upset, because I think the National Park didn't want any monument in Kalaupapa, to begin with. But before, before all of this happened, all the patients wanted in 1985, we talked about having a monument, something to recognize all those who

have passed on, the eight thousand names. And right now, we get about-- about six thousand something names.

**Oh, you want to have a—it's a large monument with the names of everybody?**

If we can, yeah. Maybe it could be one or two rocks, or something like that.

**Now, why would the National Park Service object to that?**

Well, I think it's the location that they're against. And ...

**I see.**

So we have one location that most of us, the patients feel like in the old boarding home at Kalawao. And that was right in front of Damien's church. And we know that there wasn't any graveyard, there was buildings there. On the side of the same side of the Catholic church, all that area, it looks like corral, which was afterwards. That was all graveyards. That was all graveyards. And I don't know what letter it was when Father Damien...children were playing on on the graves, like that. And Father Damien loved children. And that's my other thing that I wanted ... to bring the children, forget about the age group. There's no kids over here. I think Norbert and I are the youngest over here.

**He says he's—**

Okay.

**—younger than you by forty days.**

Yeah, a month or so.

**[chuckle]**

But by the same token, I feel for me, I like to see children come, here before before all of us gone. Because when we're gone, they're gonna have children here, walking these streets. They'll be on these streets, walking, but where's the Hawaiian family, where's the Hawaiian children?

**They haven't been here for ... as long as—**

No.

**—the settlement has, unless you—**

I want—

**Unless you have—**

—the Hawaiian children to come here while we're living. And I want to—but some of our people, our own people who talk about compassion and all that, they're strongly against having children here.

**That was a bitter division, and—**

Oh.

**—the folks like you who wanted the children here lost that battle.**

Yes. But I still am in fact, I having a hard time even to talk to Dr. [INDISTINCT] because they think the council—we have a council here.

**M-hm.**

Which is the chair. And to me, the council doesn't run the settlement. They're only advisory. But they get in their heads, that they run the settlement. No, they don't. I go—that's why—the one reason I'm outside of

the box. And you may think we have conflicts. That's the only thing I'm against about. I'd like to see not only the patients' children, but the workers'. And eh, bring 'em down now.

**On October 11th 2009, Father Damien who lived, worked, and died among the patients at Kalaupapa, was sainted by the Roman Catholic Church. Our conversation with Boogie was taped two months before Damien's canonization in Rome.**

I never thought that Father Damien was going to be sainted this soon.

**You didn't think you'd live to see it?**

Well, yeah. Well, you can put it that way.

**And did you have doubts about whether he would be accepted as a saint?**

No, because I think there were a lot of small incidents where things happened, and it wasn't even recorded. Where people said, I prayed to Father Damien, and he helped me in a small way, maybe, but when people believe that, then something must be happening. I mean, you gotta believe that. There gotta be something. If you believe you're going to get sick, then you're going to get sick. Yeah? If you believe you're going to get well, and at least, you know, that you just go for it, and you're going to get well. But I think it's mind over matter too. I believe in Damien. And oh ... that will be an exciting time.

**And it's coming up.**

Yeah—

**We're right before that event.**

That's true; that's true. And a lot of people, too bad they're not here now. And I think our going to Rome and to see this, I will do it for them too. A lot of them wanted to see this day come.

**You've been to a lot of funerals in your life.**

Oh, yeah; yeah.

**More so than the average person who does not live in Kalaupapa.**

I think so too, because you gotta go, because that's the last time you're going to see him, whether he's lying in a coffin or what. People have this thing about, they don't want to see a dead man because they want to see how—I know that, but it's the same when you have a photo. You wish you could have said something.

**So you go—**

Yeah.

**—even though it takes—**

Yeah, it takes—

**—takes a lot of you.**

Yeah. You have to go. I mean Norbert, not only Norbert, not only Norbert now. I think Gloria ... of all, I think Meli is older--oldest. Let me see, now. Meli is older than ...



**Meli is seventy-four, as we speak.**

Yeah; something like that.

**Is she one of the older ones?**

She's one of the well, I think Pauline older by months.

**What about Gertrude?**

I don't know. I think Nancy Chang—you know Nancy Chang?

**I don't know Nancy.**

Yeah. I think she's the oldest, though. Because Edwin is about eighty-two, eighty ...

**Well, right now, it seems though, there's only one patient in the convalescent center.**

That's right.

**It seems like everybody's doing okay at this moment in time, in 2009. Is that your impression? All of the remaining patients are doing pretty—**

Yeah.

**—pretty well.**

Pretty well, pretty well. Except for, I guess for some of our patients, they have to go to the hospital to take some kind of injections or what. But not to be uh, bedridden or hospital bound. But I think most of us know that there's a place down there that if anything goes wrong, you can always reflect back to that home or what. But if they, I guess, like Leahi, we have two patients, but they cannot come back now. Because otherwise, people have to go down and carry them from the plane. I think they can do that.

**For many years now, patients have been free to leave Kalaupapa... some have saved up their State benefits and traveled the world. I hope you've enjoyed our visit with Clarence "Boogie" Kahili-hiwa, ...and that you've gained some insight into why, for some patients, Kalaupapa was not always a place to dread, but, an inviting place they called "home." For Long Story Short and PBS-Hawaii, I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.**

Video clip with production credits:

**Why do they call you Boogie?**

[chuckle]

**The real story.**

Long story short, long story short. Okay, World War II, I think I was about three years old when we come from Kalapana. And we had the old type gas masks. I don't know if you folks ever ... we had the megaphone type, see, where the canister was in the front here. And going school, even kindergarten, we still had to carry our own gas mask. But my sister them used to scare me, and then we call it boogeyman, boogeyman. And so then that's how I got the name.

**[chuckle]**

My older sister gave me that name.

**I thought you were a boogie dancer.**

No.

**You boogie down.**

I got that name a long, long ago.