

**GUEST: MONTY RICHARDS**

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When you see other families suffering ... I don't get comfort out of that. I just try to work harder and figure there's gotta be a better way, there's gotta be a better way. Somebody upstairs knows better than me. Come on, give me a hint, and let's go try.

**Big Island ranching pioneer and lifetime community volunteer, Herbert Montague Richards Jr. shares his love of the land ... next on LONG STORY SHORT.**

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**Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox** is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in High Definition.

***Aloha Mai Kakou*, I'm Leslie Wilcox. High in the Kohala Mountains on the northern tip of the Big Island is Kahua Ranch, Kahua meaning the beginning, the source, the foundation. Herbert Montague Richards, Jr.—better known as Monty Richards—is a third-generation member of the Kahua Ranch family business and a fifth-generation *kamaaina* descended from Protestant missionaries. As the former President and General Manager of Kahua Ranch, Monty Richards spent over half-century with his late wife Phyllis on the homestead while raising a family of four and their grandchildren. His dream of a career in ranching came to him while spending childhood vacations at Kahua. In 1953, with an agriculture degree in hand Monty began work for the company. His initiation was learning the ropes at the company slaughterhouse in Honolulu.**

I did most of the jobs they had there, including rolling hides, which is ... whew, if you've never rolled hides, you have no idea.

**What is rolling hide?**

Rolling hides is—these are hides that are taken off the animal. And they go in a salt pack. You actually salt them down. Lay 'em out on the ground, and shovelfuls of salt put. And then when they're cured, you have to fold them up and in those days, we used to have to tie 'em up, and then they're loaded on a flat trailer. And I think we were shipping some to the mainland, some to Korea in those days.

**What for? What do they use the hides for?**

Well, shoes, belts, handbags; all the rest of those good things. The smell was out of sight. And the hides are heavy; they're sixty pounds and that sort. And I have Haole hands, and we use hide rope, which is a sisal type rope, which can cut. Because you're in salt; boy, it used to burn.

**So you graduated with this degree, and then came back and did this kind of a junk job.**

You have to learn. You have to learn. Maybe you were told how to do the job, but until you get out and do it, you don't realize how hard the work is. And when you are gonna give orders to get people to do it, they know that you have done it; and that makes all the difference in the world. In terms of labor, that's probably one of the toughest jobs. You used to do that on Saturdays, which is, you don't work five days and then you get two days off. But there are all kinds of jobs. I delivered meat. And in those days you used a pickup truck. You didn't have these nice, big vans with all the chill and all. You just—pickup truck, you cover 'em with a canvas, and you drive down and Chinatown and all, you double park, and you load quarters of beef on your shoulder, and you take 'em into the market. But those quarters weigh about a hundred and a quarter, 150 pounds, and you're walking through a narrow aisle with people buying all around. You gotta be careful you don't knock anybody down as you swing, because it's sticking out about three feet in front.

**Were they deliberately giving you the roughest jobs, because they needed to see whether—**

I think so.

**They were testing you.**

I think so.

**And—**

And it should be done that way.

**So they didn't give you any chance?**

No.

**Any break.**

No. And if you were wrong, you were politely told where you were wrong. So you just do it. Then later on, they transferred me to the Big Island.

**So you were one of the hands.**

That's right. And you rode your horse, you saddled, you caught horse at six-thirty in the morning, and off you went.

**Did you like it? Were you saying about then, were you saying, Why did I want to get into this business?**

Depends on the weather. If the weather is fine, no. If it's raining, yes. And the wind is howling at about twenty to thirty miles and hour, and you're hunched over and your horse is hunched over, and you hope he doesn't buck you off, and your slicker is hitting the horse and all, you wonder, What am I doing here? You just keep remembering that many of the people that you went to school with are junior accountants in a bank in New York City, and think of the life that

those folks lead. The Wall Street folks would just wait 'til Friday afternoon, and they'd jump in their car and they'd go to The Farm. They'd have about an hour and a half drive, and then they would spend a day and a half on The Farm. Listen, clown, you're living it all life, you're living it every day, so don't grumble, you got it made.

**Monty Richards is recognized for his pioneering efforts in high-intensity rapid-rotational-grazing techniques, and also for diversifying the business. This includes experiments with hydroponic farming and eco-friendly energy sources such as wind and solar power. Tourists are also invited to visit and explore Kahua's breathtaking scenery.**

I've been looked upon ... kind of a maverick that does things differently. For instance, I started with motorcycles here. I got started on that. And people thought it was terrible, and it probably was. So to try to make it work a little better, I referred to them as Japanese quarter horses. So to have a little bit of the pizzazz still left in it. We use ATVs now, and all—most ranches do. They make the ranch must smaller, because you're able to move around, and you're able to get things done. So you never know; some things work well, others don't work well.

**And of course, cattle aren't the only things you grow.**

No, we grow sheep. We're the largest sheep ranch here in the State. Which doesn't say much; we have about eight hundred ewes.

**How many cattle?**

Well, mother cows, Kahua has about four thousands.

**And you're doing these hybrid.**

Yeah; yeah. We're crossing in—within the four thousand ... we work with Wagyu cattle, Kobe beef. That's what we raise. And the unfortunate thing is, so much of our cattle go to the mainland to be raised and fed. Getting the Wagyu in is working well with grass fed. We are able to kill a bunch of cattle here and we run a little store at the ranch, and we sell sheep and cattle, and Wagyu. In the case of cattle, the gestation period is nine months. So if you breed a cow, nine months later, hopefully, you get a calf. She stays with mama about eight months, so here we are; now we're up seventeen months. Now you raise it on on grass another three months. Then you're about four months in feeding the animal, before it is harvested. It's a long time.

**It's expensive.**

Oh, yes. But it's experimental, and you've got to figure which ones are gonna do the best job for you. And when you're experimenting, you've got a long wait. They're not like chickens that turn over generations extremely quickly.

**So how is your experiment working? You've done this for generations of—**

M-hm.

**—of cows.**

Well, the Wagyu, for instance, you can't get any matter out of Japan. In other words, they won't ship any more semen to you for AI, or anything like that. So you've got to use what you have in the United States, and breed up with them, and try to get to the highest percentage that you can. We started at Kahua breeding artificially; the first calves hit the ground in 1966. And we were using Hereford and Angus at that time. And we've since moved on and we're continuing to breed Angus and Hereford; but it takes a long time.

**So how have your customers changed? Who do you sell to now, versus who you sold to before?**

Well ... there's been quite a change from the before. We ended up shipping to the mainland in about, I don't know, I'm guess about ten years ago, I've forgotten, when we closed down all the meat facilities here. I was president of Kahua Beef Sales and Kahua Meat Company here on Oahu. Parker Ranch closed the Hawaii Meat Company and all the rest. So that was quite a break. In those days prior to that, we used to sell to the Foodlands and the Times, and the Stars, and all the rest. And that's the majority of the meat that was raised here, was sold here. Now that we've gone to the mainland by far, most all the meat is sold on the mainland.

**Why is that?**

Well, we're not bringing it back, because it's too hard to ship it, both ways and you have to keep the—a good point is, this the original meat that came here, and all the rest. I laughingly say that people say you are what you eat, so you all ought—always ought to eat Hawaiian beef. Reason is, because our Hawaiian beef on the mainland has had an ocean voyage. Now, how many steaks have had an ocean voyage?

**[CHUCKLE]**

And then when you come to the mainland, when you come to either Canada or California, gotta have a nice, long truck ride. So it's had the ability to see the country.

**[CHUCKLE]**

So your cattle are well acclimated to having traveled. So if you eat that beef, you're getting some of that in you, and that's gotta be extremely healthy.

**[CHUCKLE] Why do you ship them away? Why can't they just live their entire lives here, and be consumed here?**

We are trying to do that. We need new slaughterhouse; we need that. We do not have the facilities. We've got to get the infrastructure back that we lost at the time they were sold.

**So—**

At the time it was closed, people in Honolulu wanted US Choice meat.

**Ah.**

Didn't want any of this grass fed stuff anymore. Nope; didn't want it. Now, the whole thing has changed. Now, people, because of the health thing, want grass fed. Okay, now you got—

### **Because it's leaner steak?**

Leaner, tastes better, it's better for you, et cetera, et cetera. But now, we've gotta build back the infrastructure that was lost, and that's extremely expensive. And the expense is caused by, number one, that time has—that we live in, and number two, is the amount of Federal regulation—

**M-hm.**

—that is involved. So you pretty much have to start with a clean sheet of paper.

### **Cattle ranching in 2010 presents a challenge to ranch owners who are struggling economically. Kahua Ranch is no exception.**

My feeling is that if you have a piece of land, the land must work for you. You work with it, but it must work for you. Now, you can have cattle on it, and that's fine. But your land isn't really working. The amount of money you can harvest from one animal, the amount—not enough. You've gotta make the land do something else. That's why we have the visitor industry on it. ATV riding, taking people, letting them see things, see a ranch going; there, you begin to make the land work. You are, number one, you are educating people that come on the place as to what you're doing, and you're showing people why they're coming to Hawaii, because they'll agriculture in operation. We've hit this tough times now. That's slowed way down. I think we'll be able to pick it up, but you always have to realize that the end game in land is houses. Once you get in houses, the game's up.

**Have—**

Do you really want to do that?

### **Have people approached you with some nice, big offers for your land?**

Well, I fend them off. I don't get down serious. We could sell it; be no problem. It's some of the most beautiful land in the State. But there's more to being a landowner than only looking for the so-called highest and best use. And the highest and best use of any land is subdivision. You ought to be smarter and make the land work for you, and help you, which in turn helps your fellow man.

### **But on the other hand, you've tried all kinds of things, and the economy hasn't helped, and the weather often hasn't helped. How are you doing at this point in 2010 with the family business?**

Not very well. But you don't give up. You don't give up.

### **How much does it wear on you? I mean, you employ people, your family's living on the property.**

When you see other families suffering ... I don't get comfort out of that. I just try to work harder and figure there's gotta be a better way, there's gotta be a better way. Somebody upstairs knows better than me. Come on, give me a hint, and let's go try. And that's ... I mean, you're getting into my philosophy of life. But that's the way I looked at it.

**Never give up.**

Nope.

**Keep trying.**

That's right.

**And what about—at what point do you consider taking an extreme right or left turn, as opposed to persevering and moving in that same direction?**

I haven't gotten there yet; I don't know.

**How was it when you turned over the reins of the business to your son, Tim, a few years ago—**

[CHUCKLE]

**—after being the boss for a long time, decades?**

[CHUCKLE] It's interesting. When you decide to do that. You ... that's a switch. You're either full-on, or you're full-off. You better go full-on, if that's what you want, and you turn it over. My tongue is two inches shorter.

[CHUCKLE]

The protein that I've eaten has been my tongue.

[CHUCKLE]

But I've tried to stay positive.

**And support him as he—**

Yes.

**—runs the business.**

That's correct.

**But you do things ...**

I do—

**Some things differently.**

—some things differently; yup. Yup.

**At what point do you step back and say, Hey, gotta listen to me on this one?**

You wait for him to come and ask you. And that's a difficult point.

**M-hm.**

And sometimes, oftentimes—don't use the word often; oftentimes, his ideas are better than yours.

**Maybe—perhaps in ranching, it's different, but it just seems that it's very hard to keep a family business or dynasty going.**

Extremely difficult; extremely difficult. And it has to do with family dynamics. What you're really looking at, do you want the family farm, because you're rapidly running out of family farms from the tax standpoint. Do you want all big corporate farms? Do you want a meeting held weekly in X County ... Ohio, where about ten people decide what the price of corn will be, or the price of soybeans?

**M-hm.**

A different ten people. Do you want that? Is that gonna be in the best interest of the United States? I think not. But how many people think that through? How many face that question?

**How many people can withstand tough times?**

That's right. How many people have got the guts to stand up fulltime? Listen; if you want to wear a sword, you better be prepared to draw the sword and get into the fight.

**I think of your living in a place where King Kamehameha the Great is said to have trained for battle. It's just steeped in antiquity at the same time—**

M-hm.

**—it serves you today. Any thoughts about that?**

The area that he was suppo—his guard were trained and all, is Kahua land. I would certainly like to be able to keep it the way it is now, or improve it from an agricultural standpoint. But not split it up to house sites. We did sell a bunch. Kohala Ranch was part of Kahua at one time. And that was it. But we stopped at a line below the cinder cones, because this other shows where Kamehameha was.

**And do you foresee a time when there might be family dissention about whether to sell off land?**

Yup.

**For housing.**

Yup.

**For real estate purposes.**

Yup. Oh, yeah; oh, yeah. Because if a person owns a ranch and you're not making money, it's costing you money; what are you gonna do? And we've gotta be smart enough to make sure that they're profitable.

**Do you know what ... whatever you're hoping for, what do you think might be the next best thing for the ranch?**

Well you make the land do something. Visitors, that sort, which keep it in agriculture, but nevertheless, let more and more people enjoy it. And when—if you do a job, you can charge for it, and everybody is happy.

**So it sounds like you don't look for ... easy work.**

No, I just look for work. [CHUCKLE]

**[CHUCKLE] And do you like it when it has a physical element to it?**

Yeah. That's fine. I mean, when you talk about physical, and I won't ride a horse anymore, I won't even get on a horse. If you fall down off a horse, when you get to be about my age, and something busts ... it may heal, but it'll be a long time. And it may never heal. So don't put yourself in that position.

**A neighbor islander, and especially a Hawaii Islander, has a different sensibility about life in Hawaii.**

Probably do. M-hm.

**And what should people in Honolulu know about Hawaii, as seen through your eyes?**

Well ... you mean, what do they look at the Big Island, and they don't see?

**M-hm.**

I'll tell you one thing; East Hawaii versus West Hawaii. To me, that is terrible. That is one island; you better damn well realize that it's an island. Hawaii Island

Economic Development Board is about twenty-some years old. I was the first president of that. I fought to make sure that people would realize that the Island of Hawaii is the Island of Hawaii; there's not East Hawaii, and West Hawaii. And that has dogged that island for now—well, as far as I know, and including now. Because you will find that the East Hawaii seems to have better roads, they seem to—all of that stuff. Why? Because where is the head hall, so to speak, is in Hilo. What's gonna come about is, West Hawaii, with all the housing and all that's going on, all the millionaire homes, that's gonna be where your tax money is gonna come from. And they're not gonna sit still to have East Hawaii get everything, and here, here's a little pinch for West Hawaii. You have to have the Island of Hawaii. And I said, You wait 'til you get a mayor from West Hawaii—

**M-m.**

—and you see what's gonna happen. You think you guys know what's coming? You ain't seen nothing yet. Because they're gonna take you apart. You've got to realize you're a whole island; you're one island, and they've even gone so far as to have, Well, maybe we should have two separate mayors and two separate police force. Ridiculous. Ridiculous.

**With no desire to run for public office like his father before him, Monty Richards, a lifelong Republican, has instead served as a volunteer for countless civic organizations and on government boards. For 16 years he was a member of the University of Hawaii's Board of Regents and a Board Director for Bank of Hawaii. Taking a leadership role with another organization helped him work through a lifelong problem with stuttering.**

When I was in grade school, I could hardly get a word out.

**M-m.**

It would get a little better, a little worse, little better, little worse. When I went to the ranch, I would stammer a lot more than I do now. But I became a— became the president of a rotary club.

**M-hm.**

And boy, that's a bear. 'Cause every week, you've got to run the meeting, and you better be prepared. So my first meeting, I remember, I stood up, looked at everybody; I said, Okay ... I'll be doing this every week. You boys are gonna want to sit in the front row, it's up to you, but I suggest you bring umbrellas and raincoats, because—

**[CHUCKLE]**

—[CHUCKLE] because you might get wet before this thing's over. Well, by my going over and doing that, I find it actually helped the stammer. Look at many of the people with real handicaps, the people with one leg, the people who have ... well, I've got a very good friend. I call him a very good friend. Name is Senator Inouye. Look how he has done with one arm. And he's carrying

shrapnel inside, and he's eighty-four years old, or something like that. There's a man that has done something. There's a man that is really doing something. You gotta take your hat off to him. Those are the people that you got to admire ... when you see what they've done.

**How do you ... how different do you feel than twenty years ago? You still feel the same inside?**

About the same. Except, I huff and puff a little more. But other than that, you get up in the morning, and you listen. If you don't hear nice music—

**[CHUCKLE]**

—you figure, hey, it's all right. Then you get up, and you look around. If you don't see the Grim Reaper with a scythe, you're okay. If you do see him, run faster. That's about the only way to do it.

**With the latest smartphone in hand Monty Richards continues to utilize and promote innovative technology. In addition to his role as chair and trustee of Kahua ranch, he is spending his retirement continuing to serve and advocate for Hawaii's agricultural community. Mahalo, Monty Richards in North Kohala, for sharing your "Long Story Short," and thank YOU for watching and supporting PBS Hawaii. 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).

Video clip with production credits:

**Do you think missionaries have gotten a bad rap in today's history of Hawaii?**

Yup. And it's unfortunate.

**How do you look back on it?**

I look back on it, I think it's bound to be. Any time you have any envy, you always try to chop down something else. And that's part of life. But you're—if you're the chopper or the choppee [CHUCKLE], it makes a difference. If you're the chopper, why, ain't bad; if you're the choppee, it actually hurts a little.

**M-hm.**

But you have to push on. You have to push on. And when asked, don't be afraid to say, No, because this, that, and the other. But you don't go looking for a fight. But if they want to fight, you give it to them.