

**GUEST: PONO SHIM: ALOHA Moments**

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Who would have known that four years later, I would be talking about Auntie Gladys and that story, almost to the day, to remind people that we all have letters to mail, but you mail them with this.

**You mail them with what?**

Integrity, compassion, honor, honesty. With the values.

**Pono Shim, who works with Oahu's business community, shares the values he's learned from his elders, next, on Long Story Short.**

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. In this episode of Long Story Short, we'll talk with Pono Shim, the head of Enterprise Honolulu, Oahu's Economic Development Board. In his work, Pono often uses stories to break through stalled discussions, find common ground, and work towards solutions. His parents, political visionaries Alvin and Marion Heen Shim, had a great influence on Pono. And there were other people, *kupuna*, who also taught him the values he still practices and shares today. We start off with a key lesson in values that Pono learned young, from his grandaunt, when she surprised people by making her way to the front of the crowd to address the 1970 Governor's Conference. She was Pilahi Paki, respected teacher and community leader, and she felt conferees really needed to hear something. She told them that in a world of strife, in search of peace, *aloha* was the answer. Using *aloha* as an acronym for Hawaiian values, she gave the word more power than a mere greeting or farewell.**

The literal translation for the word *akahai* is kindness. She taught me *akahai* means grace. And the illustration is with white gloves, that when you engage with people, you engage with white gloves. It's very clean, you don't stain, you don't leave your fingerprints. That is *akahai*. And so, what most people know about *akahai* is kindness. She was teaching me always in reference to relationship, of how you engage that relationship, and it was with white gloves. Yeah. And it means grace. The last A, *ahonui*, people know as patience. And she taught me that *ahonui* means waiting for the moment.

### **Which makes it a more active word.**

Yes.

### **And concept.**

And she said, *Ahonui* means waiting for the moment, because the moment is coming, and it may not come in our lifetime, and it may not come in your lifetime, but the moment will come. And so, you are always prepared now for the moment and for the moments that are coming, because the moment will come, and you're preparing others for the moment. So it's very different than just, I'm being patient. It's, I'm waiting for the moment.

### **It's more poised. You're poised for something rather than [SIGH] waiting.**

Yes. And it's looking for those moments. So these are values that she shared when I was just a kid. But it was so subtle. And like, *haahaa*, people know as humility. She taught *haahaa* means to me, to be empty, to go to that place of emptiness. Not humility. And then, she did this with me. She said ... [EXHALES] ... she said, The moment of emptiness, or patiently humble. Two very different things. She said [EXHALES] ... The moment of emptiness. And then you have L, A-L-O-H-A, L, *lokahi*. People *lokahi* as unity. When Auntie Pilahi taught me about *lokahi*, first thing she says, *Lokahi* doesn't mean unity. Whoa! Here she's saying it, but she's sharing with me this deeper knowledge, right? And she said, Of one mind. Which mind? The Hawaiians believed in three seats of intelligence, our rational, intellectual mind, our emotional mind, and then our *naau*, our spiritual mind. And so, I said, The *naau*. And she said, Correct. Whose mind is the *naau* mind? And I said, *Ke Akua*, our *kupuna*, God, my ancestors. She said, Yes, never forget the source of your mind, it's not your mind, it's their mind. And then, she said, *Ekahi. Kahi*.

### **One.**

One. Singular, unique, separate, the ID, the ego, independent. *Kahi*. And then she said, *Hookahi*, to make one, *hookahi*. She said, That's unity. Everybody trying to *hookahi*. With whom? With me, trying to make people one with me. She said, That's unity. And then, *alokahi*, in the presence of one, *alokahi, lokahi*. She said, Pono, *lokahi* doesn't mean unity, it means unbroken, it means connected. And she said that we all enter this universe *lokahi*, connected. What happens is, our economic, political, and education system teaches us that we're broken. I have this type of home, you have that. I have these credentials, you have that. You live here, I live there. You have this ethnicity, you speak this language. All of these things teach us we're broken, and we spend all of our time trying to *hookahi*. And I was just young, so I wasn't paying too good of attention, right? She said, You will be a storyteller, but when you tell your stories it is not for you to deposit in people's cranium. We want you to develop into a storyteller that speaks in a way that comes up inside, that people experience, Ah, that's me, because of this. They experience the connection, not the winning. She said, That's *lokahi*, unbroken.

### **So the stories are about forging connections?**

Correct. And then *oluolu*, the last letter, is generally known as pleasant. She taught me *oluolu* means gentle. That when you touch, you touch like you're touching a baby. You don't bruise, you don't scar.

### **A lot of restraint.**

Yes. The perspective of how you engage in an opportunity to connect. So, *aloha*. *Alo*, in the presence of, in the face of the connection, the *ha*. So when we look at *aloha* ... in the moment of emptiness, [EXHALES] ... we're connected again, continuously. And so, she shared that, and a few other things, and she didn't ask me to teach. She just asked me to practice. I was just a kid, and she just said, Practice. And then in 1985, she passed. She transitioned, she passed away, and she didn't change the charge. So, I really have been just practicing for a long time. And I'm probably not real good at it.

### **How have you practiced?**

In relationships.

### **Forging the connections, feeling that emptiness and the connection?**

Bruce Lee said that he was trying to develop his martial arts, his kung fu, through what he called water. That he wanted to perfect his life so much, his art, that to any action, there would be just a natural flowing reaction that was not premeditated. And I felt that's what she was asking me to do with what she was sharing. How do you develop an *aloha* response?

### **So the idea would be, you wouldn't formulate your strategy, it would simply be organic.**

Yes; I think so. Because it just became a part of what—for me, it was just moments of practice and prayer, consistently for years, just practice and prayer. But it wasn't something that, you'd go to practice. It's just life, because you remember these things when you do. Which is not most of the time, except now, it becomes more predominant.

### **And you've seen paradigms shift as you do these, the practice and prayer?**

Yeah. Yeah. Here's a small illustration. On one of the advisory boards that we sat on for the Hawaiian community, we were really talking about—a group of us were assembled as leaders, how do we help this community be a healthy community. And we spent most of our time talking about values. Well, one day, we were sitting in the meeting, and one of the members of this advisory board says, I don't understand this values conversation because I wasn't taught these. But I do understand policy and governance, because I work with money. And I understand policy and governance, and you gotta have good policy and governance because we're dealing with money. So I'm sitting there, and from what I was shared and taught, to me, now we're starting to head down a trail that is gonna lead to some potentially really destructive things if we just go and work with just policy and governance. But that is the nature for which I was warned to practice these things. Waiting for the moment.

### **You waited for the moment, and this was the moment.**

And the moment was coming up. And so, is there an *aloha* response to this that was just shared, that doesn't amputate somebody. And so, I said, policy and governance is vital to the health of a community. You gotta have good policy and governance. However, policy and governance is really low bar, and values are high bar. And I'm so fortunate that I don't have to look for my values, because Auntie Pilahi shared with me the values of *aloha*, which encompass all the values. See, policy and governance says, I'll take this piece of paper, and I throw it in the rubbish can. *Aloha* says, I will pick up this piece of paper, even though I did not put it there. There's a big difference between policy and governance, and *aloha*. Now, if we want to have healthy communities, we absolutely must establish good policy and governance, but we better reestablish our values. Because in the absence of our values, all we have are communities of degradation. And then we wonder why someone picks up a gun and shoots nineteen people. That's not a policy and governance issue, although we'll try to control it with policy and governance. It's a values issue. And so notice the moment had come. I had to go empty. And with white gloves and gentle touch, it's time to help everybody reconnect.

**With the values of *aloha*, Pono Shim, as President and CEO of Enterprise Honolulu, helps some of Hawaii's top business executives break log jams in the boardroom. Unobtrusively, he guides debates to a higher level, above head-butting and individual agendas, to that place of connection. And he uses stories to do it. Here, Pono shares one of these stories with us. It's August of 2001, and his daughter has just been waitlisted for the seventh grade at Kamehameha Schools. Distraught over a possible error in his daughter's academic records, and in need of reassurance, Pono visits Gladys Brandt, the former Kamehameha Schools principal who later challenged its trustee system. In a series of conversations with Auntie Gladys, we see how leading a life of *aloha* with grace and dignity can make the seemingly impossible, possible.**

I said, Auntie Gladys, I just want peace. You tell me it's okay so that I can just let it go. Some ground rules. I don't want to hurt another Hawaiian family. I just want to know it's okay. Please tell me what we can do to be better next time. And she said, Okay. So she goes through my daughter's file and she says, Remarkable, remarkable, remarkable, remarkable. And soon, she closes the file and she says, Pono, I'm disturbed, there's an injustice here, this child should be going to the school. Now, she's upset. I don't know what to do. I gotta call this person, and I'm trying to calm her down. 'Cause I'm coming for peace, now a *kupuna* is upset. So, we talked, and eventually, we started to share our dreams and our hopes, our aspirations for a couple of hours. At the end of two hours, she said, Pono, I have to share something with you. So she runs over to her desk, and she picks up five pieces of paper. She says, I'm a cancer survivor. And I said, No, I didn't. She said, Yeah, I had breast cancer. Because of that, I have this tremendous affinity to the American Cancer Society. And she said, A few

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years ago, the Weinberg Foundation made a promissory of a million dollars to the American Cancer Society of Hawaii, if they did a matching. And so, she said, About a month ago, I received a call and they said, Gladys, we need your help. We haven't raised any money, and we're about to lose a million-dollar endowment. So she says to me, Where am I gonna get a million dollars from? I can't just pull out my checkbook. And she said, but she felt burdened. So what she did was, she started to meditate. And from that, a face came to her of someone who had passed, and she composed a letter. And so, she wrote this letter asking someone for a million dollars. And then she read it to me. And when she was done reading that letter to me, I said, Auntie Gladys, if I ever write like that, I'm *pau*. That is the most beautiful literature I have ever heard in my life, asking someone for a million dollars. And she said, Pono, it took me five days to mail it. I went down to the mailbox, and I couldn't put it in, and I had to run home. Next day, tried again, I couldn't put the money before the relationship. On the fifth day, she said, Gladys, put it in the mailbox, to herself. She put it in, and she ran home. Two weeks later, she gets a call from England, and this lady says, Gladys, I am in England, my secretary called me and read the letter to me, we need to talk about this, and I'll be home on this date. So, this was in August of 2001, on a Saturday. So she says, Pono, this past Wednesday, I was at Hee Hing Restaurant, sitting there drinking water, waiting for this lady to come in to speak with me. She walks in the restaurant, she sits down, and she says, Gladys, I read your letter, and here's your million dollars.

**Whoa!**

And she slid a check across the table. And Auntie Gladys looks at me and says, Pono, somebody gave me a million dollars! And we started cracking up. She said, I can't believe it! I can't tell anybody, because she wants to remain anonymous, but I've been dancing on air. I needed to tell somebody.

**And that story has become lore around the islands, hasn't it? And I don't know who gave the money. Do you know yet?**

Yes, I do.

**Okay; can you say?**

Yeah, she's gone now.

**Who was it?**

Barbara Cox.

**Oh, Barbara Cox Anthony.**

Yeah, Anthony.

**The media mogul, media heir.**

Yes. And what happened was, she said, I can't believe somebody gave me a million dollars! So, we laughed and laughed, and then I said, Auntie Gladys, whatever you decide, I'm okay. She said, I don't know what to do. I said, It's okay, whatever you decide, I'm okay. And I left her apartment, and I'm driving away, and I called her. And I said, Auntie Gladys, I know why my daughter did not get accepted to Kamehameha. And she said, Oh? Why? I said, Because Ke Akua wanted me to spend three hours with you today. And she says, Wow!

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And I said, Auntie Gladys, it's amazing to have a million dollars to give away. And she said, Yes. I said, It's amazing to need a millions dollars, to receive it. And she said, Yes. But I said, Auntie Gladys, to live your life with so much integrity, so much honor, so much compassion, so much grace, so much dignity, so much promise and *aloha*, that someone says, I value your word at least at a million dollars, is remarkable.

**It was a letter.**

And I said, And that's why my daughter did not get accepted to Kamehameha, because God wanted me to learn that today.

**All right. Well, I have to ask you, did your daughter ever get into Kamehameha, ninth grade?**

So, what happened is, two years later, she gets into Kamehameha. And during her junior year, this is August of 2005, almost exactly four years later, for whatever circumstances, I am now the president of Kamehameha Schools Association of Teachers and Parents. On one the saddest days in Kamehameha's history, which is the day that the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals struck down our admissions policy, and I'm the president of the Teachers and Parents. So I'm invited to a meeting with all the leaders of the Kamehameha community, and it was tough. It's a hurtful meeting. You know, it was. Who would have known that four years later, I would be talking about Auntie Gladys and that story, almost to the day, to remind people that we all have letters to mail, but you mail them with this.

**You mail them with what?**

Integrity, compassion, honor, honesty. With the values.

**At the time of this conversation in 2012, Pono Shim is in his forties. Equipped with the teachings of his elders, he sits on the Advisory Council for the University of Hawaii West Oahu. Hoping to set a positive example for young people, Pono is setting out to earn his own college degree.**

**It's interesting that you're guiding a school, and don't have the degree. But you look at people like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, didn't have degrees.**

Well, those are brilliant people.

**But it's not necessary, it's just something that you'd like to do.**

Alice Holokai shared with me about healing, and to use my gift not to hurt, but to help. Auntie Pilahi, Nana, and others, my Dad, my Uncle Walter ... for all the things that I'll probably never, ever have a chance to get some credentials that will validate what was shared, because I don't think that there's a degree or school. Not that I would want one.

**Do you think that's your true education?**

I'd like to believe it. I mean, think about what I'm doing, the opportunities that I have. Those guys are tremendous guys, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, and you know, they're brilliant beyond anything that I could ever dream or hope for. I was given a vey special education. They took me on the side and just said,

Practice and practice. And two years ago, I received a message that it was time to share.

**So you were fortunate enough to receive and listened, smart enough to listen to lost knowledge, and then to practice it so that it could be made part of a life.**

I don't think it was a necessary obvious decision on my part, and I don't think I was listening too good. It scares me how much I probably wasn't.

**Do you think you missed a lot?**

Yeah. Absolutely.

**But sometimes, you remember things that make sense to you later.**

Things come back.

**Come back; right. What did Nana Veary tell you? And I say that, having—I've spoken with Emma Veary, her daughter, and she gave me a framed piece of writing from Nana. It says, Guard your thoughts. And it's all about the discipline of thinking positively, and just being disciplined about what your mind concentrates on.**

Nana said, Find the joy. And she also said, Find it inside of us. Because there's so much noise. But she said, Find the joy, and find it inside of us. That's powerful stuff. In the movie, *The Last Samurai*, and Tom Cruise is practicing judo with somebody, and one of the characters runs up to him and he said, Too many mind, mind the people watching, mind the person you're fighting. Too many mind. No mind. And see, that's also the charge of *haahaa*, which is to go to emptiness.

**But a lot of people have a hard time being alone, and being empty. They like to be filled with noise, and activity.**

I love solitude. I spend a lot of time in it, and even though I'm around a lot of people, and in various situations. My wife will tell people ... they'll say, Does he always watch people? Yeah; that's him.

**So you're on your own, watching people, observing.**

I'll watch people. It's almost like I'll rubberneck, kind of just watching people, just taking it in, just listening. The thing is, I think that what they were sharing with me is to listen for the place of connection, not to listen to the place of disconnection. And so, now, bringing that all together into what I do at Enterprise Honolulu, that's what I shared with Mike Fitzgerald, that, we're not telling the one story which includes everyone, we're telling the stories that disconnect everyone, and how do we find those stories of connection that are above the argument. Another example of an *aloha* moment. I was on the Statehood Panel for the 50<sup>th</sup> State. Hawaiian panel, it was on live TV. And I was walking out of the auditorium, and this man, he's a legislator, says to me, You know, Pono, when you talk about *Ke Akua*, are you talking about old *Ke Akua*, or new *Ke Akua*? And I said, What? Then he said, Are you talking about old *Ke Akua*, or new *Ke Akua*? And I said, What in the world are you talking about? He said, Are you talking about old God, or new God? And I said, Okay. There's one God; okay? And he says, Okay. Same one been here from the beginning, same one going be here at the end; okay? He says, Okay. I said, God has a

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frequency; okay? And he says, Okay. Same one going be here at the beginning, same one will be here at the end; okay? He says, Okay. I said, You know what the problem is? He said, What? Some people think that the only ones who have the channel. And he looks at me. And I said, And it's not true. From the beginning of time, people have a channel to that frequency, but because people are fighting for the exclusive right to the channel, we have wars. When we should be asking each other, What in the world are you getting off that channel? Because it's probably the same thing, and we'll complement each other. And because I didn't want to be on the media, I said, I'm sorry, I gotta go. And I just left. But, you see, how do you shift the conversation above the argument. People just stood there, kinda ... Okay, what do we do with this? I like to speak in symbolism. You know, find the connection.

**Finding the connection is a challenge Pono Shim takes on every day. The values he lives are universal. He's carrying on Auntie Pilahi Paki's belief in the power of aloha, with the strengths it encompasses as the search continues for peace in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. For Long Story Short, and PBS Hawaii, I'm Leslie Wilcox. *A hui hou kakou.***

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It wasn't ever a big deal about who we associated with. But I remember after we went back to school after the winter break, and some people were talking about the Fabulous Five. I said, Oh, yeah, they came over for New Year's dinner. They said, Yeah, right. And we couldn't prove it. Because we could never talk about it, you know.