

GUEST: KEPA MALY: A SENSE OF CONNECTION

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I believe—and I say this honestly and with respect to my blood family that it was the *ohana* and the extended families like that, that they're the only reason I'm alive today. They filled ... a void. That sense of spirituality, that sense of connection, that we're a part of something. And they gave me that.

He's a researcher who connects the dots of places, and people, and cultures. Kepa Maly, executive director of Lanai Culture and Heritage Center, 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. Kepa Maly's remarkable story begins as a youngster living on Oahu, feeling disconnected. He had a different first name then. As a teenager, he was adopted by an elderly Native Hawaiian couple on the Island of Lanai. Taken under the wing of the Kaupuiki's, who had already raised sixteen children, Kepa learned the Hawaiian language. He welcomed a new first name and a new sense of belonging, and he fully embraced the cultural practices and values of his *hanai* family. As an adult, Kepa Maly adds to the knowledge that his elders shared with him. For the past three decades, he and his wife Onaona have been documenting the stories of people, places, and history of Hawaii.**

Just circumstances in family arose, and I was actually blessed. You look at it in that hindsight. And I had this opportunity to go to Lanai, and actually ended up being cared for as—*keiki hookama* is the real word. We use *hanai* all the time now, but *hookama* means where someone takes on the responsibility of caring for someone's child. And of one of the preeminent families of the Island of Lanai, and that's what started my whole life.

So not a legal adoption.

No, no.

But a ... a full embrace.

Yes; yes.

And in fact, that's where your name comes from?

You're right. Tutu folks called me Kepa, and when I inquired about it, they said that it's to surround, to embrace. And it's actually part of a little longer name, but you know, what a blessing.

What is the longer name?

Kepaleiohukaahe [PHONETIC]. Because I was also a single child, yes. And *lei* is the garland, *ohu* adorning, *kahe*, the single or the one adoring child.

That's not a name I've ever heard before.

No. Yeah; I was blessed. These were people who were the embodiment of what Hawaiians are, that love. It didn't matter. In 1924, a group of Filipino fishermen from Maui got ... capsized the boat, they washed up nearly dead on the shore of Lanai. Tutu Papa, young man at that time, goes and takes them, brings them to their home. Helps restore them to life, Tutu Mama them, and they returned them to Maui to their own families. Japanese, Filipino, whatever. That was their way of life. You *aloha* unconditionally.

Tutu folks; how old were Tutu folks?

Tutu Papa Daniel Kaopuiki was born in 1819. His wife, Tutu Mama Hattie Kaenaokalani Kaopuiki, was born in 1892. And so, they were these incredible people that bridged two worlds. They were competent in English, but of course, Hawaiian was their *olelo makuahine*, their mother tongue, the language of their *naau*, what they felt, yeah? And so, from them and their cousins on Lanai, I gained some skills with the Hawaiian language. Tutu Papa was also the *kahuna pule* of our little Hawaiian church. And so, it was a part of the daily life, yeah, between church, between home and just hearing stories that were told about places and how people connect to place, to resource, to practice, yeah?

Did you know Hawaiian before you got there?

No. Not a ... *sukoshi*, nothing.

What were you like as a boy when you began living on Lanai?

I think I was always odd man out. Plus, hard to tell now, I was very introverted. You know, pretty shy. I was definitely the novelty. I was the only *Haole* in my class, only Caucasian in my class. Class of '72, thirty-two students.

Oh, throughout the time you were there?

Yeah. I believe—and I say this honestly and with respect to my blood family, that it was the *ohana* and the extended families like that, that they're the only reason I'm alive today. I know that for a fact. And they filled a void. And also, I know some people don't like to talk about it, but that sense of spirituality, that sense of connection, that we're a part of something. And they gave me that. And it is because of them, and years of working with *kupuna* from Niihau through Hawaii, and not just Hawaiian elders, but of all different ethnic backgrounds. People that were willing to share a little bit of their *aloha* and their time. You become family. I know that they didn't set out to have me go on the path that we've ended up traveling in our careers and life. But again, it's a way of life, not a job. But they inspired me, they filled that need. They gave me something to connect with.

Kepa Maly's deep fascination with the special places and the people of his adopted island led to his appointment as the executive director of Lanai Culture and Heritage Center. Besides housing priceless artifacts, the nonprofit organization operates an oral history program to help tell the story of Lanai's multicultural community. After high school, he would travel and work in a number of other places before returning to Lanai, to Oahu's Kualoa Regional Park as a park naturalist, to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, where I met him and saw him mesmerizing visitors as an interpretive ranger, then off to the Continent on assignment at the Grand Canyon. He also worked as a curator and exhibit designer at Kauai Museum. Along the way, he encountered many of Hawaii's cultural leaders who shared their knowledge and traditions handed down from their own *kupuna*.

We're over there at Honaunau, and there's this old Hawaiian gentleman sitting on the porch of his home, right down at the *puuhonua*. And I see this man, incredible face, this *kanaka*. And I look; I say, Oh, *aloha mai, pehea oe*. And the old man looked at me, and then he just turned around and went inside the house. I thought, *Auwe*. I felt sad. I said, Oh, well, here's one 'nother *Haole*, he just thinks. But it was so funny, 'cause I continued walking around past his house, and from the back of his door, he called, *Hui, hele mai, hele mai*. This old man was Apelehama Kauokaumaha [PHONETIC] Moses. Pure Hawaiian, but took the *Haole* name Moses because in that mission period time, the name Kauokaumaha could have had not a positive meaning. And so they took the name Moses. But Tutu Apelehama ... *mai, mai, mai*. We sat down and spoke. I actually went and stayed with him for a week afterwards, he and his wife. But what he said was, I heard your voice, you have a *mana* in your voice that other people won't have. And he said, What your people took away, you can help give back. And this is '75. That meant a great deal to me.

What your people took away, you can give back.

Yeah. And actually, I think that it's true, but we can't live our lives as victims also. There are *kuleana* and *pono*, the responsibilities and the rights that Tutu folks, all *kupuna* talk about. But there is something about Hawaii. I have no college education, I've taught at UH. My wife and I, Onaona and I do ethnographic studies. We do the equivalent of seven or eight PhD dissertations a year for historic preservation programs. But it roots back to our teachers, who were the people who wrote the books or who the books were written about. Onaona's *kupuna* was Mrs. Pukui. I knew Tutu Kawena before I knew my wife Onaona. Mary Kawena Pukui, Tutu Kawena ... as you know, was this incredible woman, Hawaiian historian, bridging late 1800s through the 1980s. She was a mentor of Auntie Maiki Aiu Lake, who in 1973, I met. I had come from Lanai to listen to a lecture that Auntie Maiki was giving with Robert Cazimero as the dancer at that time, at Maui Community College. I was already engaged, I loved the *mele* and *hula*, and I wanted to take. I wanted some formal training. I had had training on Lanai a little bit. And after the program, I went up to her,

introduced myself, and in that Auntie Maiki style, she just embraced me and said, If you move to Honolulu, I will teach you. She gave me everything. I graduated *uniki* from her, Papa Ilima in 1975. And in that process, she introduced me to Tutu Kawena. She said, I can teach you what I know but no one knows everything. She also said, Take credit for what you create, don't say it was old. I like that. But she said, Here is a saying. People said, Oh, that Kawena thinks she knows this and that, and she's this and that. She said, from her *kupuna* ... I learned this saying, and this is how I live. [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE] Don't go peering and peeking around everybody else's doors, just stand and speak from the door of your own house. And she told me, That's all I have done. An incredible woman. Without her Hawaii would be so much poorer. There's ... incredible lessons that we have, that we can learn by just listening to the voices around us. We're no longer talking story the way we did before days, yeah?

We're too distracted, right?

That's correct. And so we need to have this with people that can share the nuances, the beauty of life, and those things that make us stronger. I think the most important saying that I learned from Tutu Papa and he must have been inspired to tell me this. Or maybe it was just the way I acted; who knows. The first saying, and the one that has lived with me throughout my life, and I'll take it to the grave with me is, *O ka mea maikai malama, o ka memea ke oli hookawale haku* [PHONETIC]. Keep the good, set the bad aside.

Easier said than done.

It is, isn't it?

But great advice.

It is incredible advice.

Did you figure out how to do that?

I believe I have. But of course, I also have a heart problem, and it really surprised me when I had my first episode. So I thought, Well, maybe I'm not doing as good a job as I thought I was, but—

Of keeping stress away from your life?

But genetics too. So I can blame it on that. But yes, I believe, 'cause like you imagine today someone driving down the road, and they left late. That's their problem to begin with, right? And now they're rushing to get somewhere, they're gonna be—all that stress that builds up, and it's useless, right, to get irate about it. So Tutu folks keep the good, set the bad aside.

And they could do that?

They did. Yeah. I think they had to. Lanai was a stressed island, particularly after Western contact. So if you became the victim, you know, *pau*, waste time, yeah? And look at these people, they raised and they touched so many people's lives. Tutu folks told us, *Mai kaulai ka lima i ka la* [PHONETIC], don't put the palm of your hand up to the sun. *Huli ka lima ilalo a hana, alo ao i ka ae* [PHONETIC], turn your hand down and work, and you will have food to sustain yourself. What a simple, basic value. And our children aren't getting that; we're all learning this. Yeah? Put the palm up. I want to share with you three cute

twists on a saying. On Lanai, Tutu Papa taught me ... *maikai ka hana a ka lima, o nono kai a ka waha* [PHONETIC]. When the hands do good work, the mouth has good food to eat. Cool, yeah?

I like that.

It is. You think about it. Then, I'm working with Tutu Kinoolu Kahananui, later years, yeah, in Kona District. And wonderful old man, native speaker, great, great historian. His *tutu* taught him, *hana inu ka lima ai i nono ka waha* [PHONETIC]. Do dirty work with your hands, you going eat dirty food. Same idea, right? But a whole different twist.

Other side of it.

Yes.

The facet.

Yes. And then, we go with Tutu Mahiula Hashimoto at Haena on Kauai. Nice man, wonderful fisherman. His *tutu*, his saying was more simple. *Hana ka lima ai ka waha* [PHONETIC]. Work, you going eat. [CHUCKLE] You know.

I know people who are skilled in Hawaiian arts like to share, but they don't share with everyone. So they chose to share with you.

Mahalo ke Akua. That's all we can say. You know, somehow that gift from God of a little *Haole* boy being off on the side somewhere, but coming up and being at the right place at the right time. I don't think it was an accident. We do work now—you know, Onaona and I, in our oral history, we've done close to a thousand oral history interviews across the state, recorded interviews from Niihau through Hawaii.

What's the best question you ask? What elicits the best responses?

O wai kou inoa? What is your name? *O wai oe?* Who are you? Where do you come from? Who are your *kupuna*? And I'm sorry, it can be one, but the next one is, and What is your *aina*? That *aina* is what connects everybody, yeah?

You hardly have to ask more questions after that.

Yeah.

What is your *aina*? Has it become Lanai?

In my heart, it is Lanai. For years, Onaona and I have worked around the state, and I was telling her in 2005; I says, Kinda shame though, yeah? I've never had the opportunity for us to do an ethnographic study on Lanai. And in 2005, after I said that, the first opportunity arises. And then we get asked by members of the community who were involved in a memorandum of agreement, this development was being proposed and then developed on Lanai. I get asked by the community members, Come home and help us make a museum. So Lanai is the home of my heart.

And what is ethnographic? I'm sorry, I don't know.

Well, it's the collection of the stories of people. So archeology. And I sometimes even disagree, when we were working on the state process, when they say, Oh, this is an archeological site, this is this. I say, Uh-uh, it starts first as a cultural site. Archeology looks at the biggest piles of stones and bones, those are the things

that are significant. But I can tell you that just a named *puu*, a named point ... every place that is named has a story to tell.

But sometimes, you don't get the right story. Later generations tell a different version.

Oh, yes.

How do you get the right version of why it was named that?

And I humbly say this, is that ... well, Tutu, yeah, and Auntie Maiki or Tutu Pukui folks, *aohe pau ka ike ka halau hookahi* [PHONEITC]. That not all knowledge comes from one school. So maybe my right—not mine, but the right that I've been taught may not be someone else's right. But the bottom line is, you go through the historical accounts, the native language newspapers, and incredible resources that have been collected. I believe that those *kupuna* were writing so that future generations would know the stories. So, what we do is you connect those historical resource materials with the stories of people who were living on the land, and who are descended of the land. And they could be Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, *Haole*. But people that interacted with people Tutu's generation and older, yeah? And we present it as this is the story that they tell, this is their *pono*, their right. And you let it speak for itself. This is one of the reasons that sometimes archeologists today, they say, Well, Kepa and Onaona are doing this work, but they're not making judgments on it. And I said, It's not my right to make a judgment on it. The people speak for themselves, the land for itself. And you can also see where ... Tutu Kawena, I asked her at one point. We were talking about John Papa li's fragments of Hawaiian history, which is a product of one of the preeminent Hawaiian historians, right? So I said, Tutu, *pehea oe o no a kela inoa* [PHONETIC], fragments of Hawaiian history. I always had a hard time understanding what that meant. And she looked at me and said, *Na li nu*, it was li himself who called it that. [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE] *moololo* Hawaii, fragments of Hawaiian history. His own title. And so what I take from that, and when I speak about it today is, I say that if John Papa li, who was born and raised as an attendant to the Kamehameha children, as a steward to those children, he witnessed the last human sacrifice at Papaenaena Heiau, on Leahi, on Diamond Head. He traveled with the Kamehameha family back to Hawaii. If it was fragmented for him in his time, how much more so for us today. So those fragments that we have left are treasures. It will speak for itself. And you can see where the connections go. You can see where this tradition, even if we've never heard this before, you can see does it fit comfortably with this body of knowledge that has been gifted down to the generations. And in some instances, you can see where if someone's out there changing a whole genealogy, mm, *a na hui kaua* [PHONETIC], maybe it's a little confusing there.

I notice that you use the word *Haole*.

M-hm.

And I know that there are some people in the public who say ... that's not appropriate. If they're Caucasian, it makes them feel like an outsider, it seems pejorative to a group. What is your feeling about the word *Haole*?

Well, and I apologize if I've offended anyone. But, it's very interesting. In the oldest context of the word a *Haole* is anyone who is not Hawaiian. Only Hawaiians are *kanaka*. So the original context now, this is a good example of stories being passed on. So one of the families that's well known on Lanai was that of Charles Gay. And he married a pure Hawaiian woman, and his last surviving child, Auntie Venus Gay Holt, just passed away the later part of last year at a hundred and six. While talking with Auntie Venus, and then her older brothers, there's a story about how the word *Haole* even came up. Two versions of the story.

Oh, I'd love to hear.

Okay. And these were family traditions, and I can't tell you that this is really what it means, because as we said, if you go to the dictionary, you go to old language resources, *Haole* was anyone who was not Hawaiian. But, Captain Cook arrives off of Kauai in 1778, and this is from Roland Gay and his brother, Lawrence. And the chiefs, the people, they're off of Waimea, they see this floating island, right? Ah, *ua hiki mai o Lono*, Lono has arrived, yeah? And the chiefs of Kauai sent canoes out to greet these people and begin to offer them *mele*, chants, the genealogy. [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE] Your body is Lono there in the heavens. It was Lono [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE]. It was Lono who caused the stars to be strung through the heavens. And the people on the boat, Captain Cook folks, sat there with no response. And the Hawaiians were *puiwa*. First thing, they run back, 'cause they see them hemo their clothes, yeah, take their clothes off like that, and all white skin underneath. They run back. One story is, [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE], skinless people. Yeah? The other one was, [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE], people who had no breath of life. Because these life-giving chants that had been offered went unresponded to.

That's where the no breath of life comes in. I see. So now, you use *Haole* to mean Caucasians? Or do you use it for anybody not Hawaiian? Filipinos, Samoans.

Yes. I do. Sorry, 'cause that's what I was taught the word means. And I don't mean it in a negative way. It's just that we're not as lucky.

At home and at work, Kepa Maly's partner of over thirty years is his wife, Onaona. Their business, Kumu Pono Associates, mirrors the efforts of Onaona's grandaunt, the renowned Hawaiian scholar, Mary Kawena Pukui, whom you heard Kepa mention. Since the business' establishment in 1995, it has completed more than three hundred ethnographic studies and conducted more than five hundred oral history interviews. Lots of stories. And then, there's the love story of Kepa and Onaona Maly.

Well, Onaona actually is descended from the Pukui and Mahoe lines in Kaiapa. Those are the main lines. But what's interesting, like her great-great-grandaunt was Queen Liliuokalani's adopted daughter, Lydia Aholo. And we knew Tutu Aholo up 'til she was a hundred years old to hear these stories of her upbringing

and how she would play hide-and-seek with the Queen's other children before the Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center was made. But when she would play hide-and-seek, Auntie Lydia would go hide under the Queen's dress. And no one, of course, would go seek for her under there.

Oh, good one.

Yes. So what happens is, now I'm working at Kualoa. We've opened Kualoa, and Onaona's mother is a teacher at Bingham Tract School. And we're, of course, working with schools from around the islands, right, thinking about doing camping programs, canoeing programs, back country programs with these youth who often would have no other opportunity to do anything like this, yeah? So this is God's truth. I hear the car arrive. I know the group is coming. I hear a car arrive, I step out of my office. It's Onaona and her father. Onaona opens the door of the car, steps out. Kanehoalani is the highest peak of the ridge above Kualoa, and the sun is setting above it. And I swear, this ray of light comes down, illuminates Onaona, and for me, it was love at first sight. I hope that she was okay about it. We were married six months later. [CHUCKLE]

Have you asked her what her impression of you at first sight was?

She loves me.

[CHUCKLE]

I'm blessed. [CHUCKLE]

And that had never happened to you before, right?

Never; nah.

This was not a common occurrence for you.

No, no. No, no; not a common occurrence at all.

This light bathing—

Yeah, yeah. To me, it was it was like, wow. And we chuckle about it all the time, and when people ask us, this is our story.

Kepa Maly continues to work to maintain a sense of place and balance on Lanai, and in Hawaii. The man who once was an alienated kid has made it his life's mission to find and share connections in our island home. We'll hear more from Kepa Maly about his spiritual connection to Lanai on an upcoming episode of Long Story Short. Thank you, Kepa, for sharing your stories with us, and thank you for watching and supporting PBS Hawaii. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.

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Hawaiians are real people, living people. Tutu Kawelo taught me a beautiful saying, because we were talking about Kawelo of Kaalaia. We were talking about *anaana*, sorcerer practices like that. And Tutu said, [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE]. In all people, there are some that are good and some that aren't. And so, she was also tied in the conversation about whether you *Haole*,

someone who was not of Hawaiian ancestry, of other mixed ancestries, or real people doing real things, living their lives as best they could. And I believe the Hawaiians left us models. We have models that we can learn from to actually live better in our island landscape. There's only so much to go around; you take too much today, *pau*, tomorrow you don't eat. That idea of [HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE], healthy land, healthy people. Yeah?

Enough is plenty.

Yeah; that's right.