

GUEST: SHIM KANAZAWA

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It was really a job that was so hard, in a way, because we were dealing with mothers of boys who were in war, and husbands in the camps. So much crying, every day.

Shim Kanazawa, community leader and advocate for Hawaii families, 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, and welcome. We do have to make this long story short, as our guest is ninety-six years old at the time of this conversation, and her life is way too full to fit into a half hour. Shim Kanazawa is often referred to as the Florence Nightingale of Hawaii. She's known for her humanitarian efforts during the last seven decades. During World War II, Shim Kanazawa became the lifeline for many Hawaii Japanese American families torn apart by incarceration in relocation camps. The Honolulu Consulate of the Swedish Government, which stayed neutral during the war, hired her in a critical civilian role. She served as liaison between the Japanese American community and the U.S. military authorities. In these many years following the war, her volunteer work with numerous boards and organizations has led to programs and services that improved the quality of life for island families. Country girl, Shim Kanazawa, was born in 1915 in Kamuela on Hawaii Island, and raised on Parker Ranch. As the eldest of eleven siblings, it was assumed that she would remain at home to help take care of the younger children. It was the unconventional thinking of her parents, Torazo and Saki Ryusaki, that helped make the way for a much brighter future.

My parents were very good to us, and they treated us like individuals, and so, they gave us all the opportunity to do what we wanted to do. And I was very happy growing up in the big family. And they were poor, but they never mentioned the financial situation. My father had a garage, and also, a taxi stand. There were only two taxi stands, and he was one of them. And he was a very gregarious person and made friends easily. And so, whenever the car broke down or something, he would invite all of them to the house for dinner or

lunch, or whatever. So my mother always had a pot full of some kind of a soup and rice; she always had that. And so, she was able to feed all of the people [CHUCKLE] that my father invited. [CHUCKLE] And my mother was a housewife, and she worked so hard from early morning 'til night, and really took care of all of us.

Now, you were on the ranch. What was the connection of the paniolo's, the cowboys in your life?

Well, actually, we lived on Parker Ranch, but we didn't have a Parker Ranch home. We had our own home. And my father worked on the ranch, but he was the chauffeur for the Parker Ranch nurse too.

How did you all get along, all the eleven kids?

Very well. In fact, I was the eldest, so I thought that after I graduated from Waimea Elementary School, that maybe I have to take care of one of the siblings. But my parents said, no, they wanted me to have the best education, so they sent me to Hilo. And so, I went to Hilo Intermediate School, Hilo High School, and graduated from the high school.

Who did you live with?

Oh, I lived at the Jodo Shu, which is a Buddhist school. Actually, they had a school and a church, and I was with them.

How was that? You were an intermediate school student living without your big family. What was your life like?

It was so difficult, because Waimea School, maybe there were about twenty, twenty-five people, all in one room. But Hilo Intermediate, there were about two hundred fifty or something. And so, I began to stutter. And I stuttered so bad that I couldn't face the people when I spoke. I turned my back to them. And I couldn't answer the telephone call, because it's so hard to get that H, hello, out. But instead of sending me to a nearby school, either Kona or Honokaa, or Kohala, they wanted the best for me, so they sent me to Hilo.

Did you write to them during the time you were in intermediate and high school and living away?

No.

No contact?

No, well, once in a while, they used to bring vegetables from Waimea, and come to Hilo. But otherwise, no contact.

Did you ever say, Take me with you, I want to go home?

No. No, I knew that with such a big family, that my parents had enough to do. And so, I had to just stick it out.

You seem like you're grateful for what some might not be grateful for. I mean, you didn't get to live at home starting in intermediate school. You see it as a great opportunity, because you got a better education.

Yes.

You don't see it as, I couldn't live with my family.

No, no. No, I didn't. But of course, the siblings missed me, but I can come back only at Christmas, maybe, and summer. That's all.

How did you get rid of the stutter?

Mrs. Putnam, who was the vice principal for Hilo High School, she took me under her wings. And I think she was the one that gave me the confidence, 'cause I used to go to the house quite a bit, and I think that's how I got through with my stuttering. But it was really hard when you stutter. But I got on okay. And my junior year, my friends got together and they elected me as president of the senior class.

Immediately following high school, Shim Kanazawa worked at Big Island public schools, and was later promoted to the Department of Education's Vocational Division in Honolulu. As with everyone in Hawaii, Shim Kanazawa's life was transformed with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and the martial law that followed. The Queen's Hospital, which bore the brunt of caring for the civilian war casualties, was administered by Gustav Olsen, who also served as the Vice Consul of Sweden. Hard pressed, he needed assistance administering to Hawaii's demoralized Japanese community, and set out to hire a liaison between that community and the U.S. military. Shim Kanazawa was recommended as someone who possessed the unique qualifications to fill the job.

She must speak Japanese, but more important, I want a girl with a Red Cross heart.

A Red Cross heart.

And so, he me sight unseen. He didn't even see me. And so, that's how I had this job at the Swedish Vice Consulate.

And the way the consulate of Sweden became involved was, they were a neutral party during the war, and they were assigned to take care of, quote, Japanese interests.

That's right.

So, you were in a very influential position.

Yeah.

You got to circulate among high up U.S. military, and disillusioned and discouraged Japanese families who'd been broken up by war, and distrusted by their own government.

I was a liaison between the military government and the civilian population of Japanese. And so, I was given a pass that I could go anywhere, anytime, and be one of those that would have the priority. And so, it was really a job that was so hard, in a way, because we were dealing with mothers of boys who were in war, and husbands in the camps. I had to go down to the Military Intelligence Office and find out why the husbands were taken away, and the parents would come crying on our shoulders because they don't know what to do. We cry with them too, and they want to tell me what they think even about their own

family. And so, sometimes when the sons come to the office, and then try to get information, and I think to myself, Your mother was here and told me about you. [CHUCKLE] But I never tell them anything, and I keep everything to myself. That's the hardest thing. All the data of the family, that is given out. But anything else, I kept it to myself. So it makes it hard for me. But, so much crying, every day.

And you're a problem solver, and you couldn't solve all those problems. You could just give empathy and give whatever official support there was.

Yeah. I had to get some jobs for the wives too. And so, I had a friend who had an *aloha* shirt factory, and so I would get parts, like the sleeve or the front or back, or something, by pieces, and give them to sew that part. Because the wives of the ministers and all of that, they never had experience of sewing or anything like that. So I had to give them pieces.

And you know that you were often referred to as the Florence Nightingale of Hawaii. What do you think of that?

Well, that's when I took that group of internees, there were about thirty of them, to Crystal City, Texas, to meet their families. And the submarine was still lurking around, and it was really a very scary experience. I had to leave them at the gate, because they wouldn't allow us to go inside. And that's when the National Red Cross and the Swedish government and the military gave me a trip to travel through thirty-seven states. And I did that in three months. [CHUCKLE]

So it was a perk, it was a vacation for you after all the work you did in the war?

Yeah. I stayed at the Romanian Embassy. When I traveled to different places, the military officers clubs took care of me.

And you were traveling alone?

I was traveling alone. And I never traveled before, and for me to get on the train was a new experience. And so someone said on the way, How come you travel with your head up high? And he says, You're not like the other internee families, because they would be afraid to walk with their head up.

Did you feel racism? Did you experience racism?

No, nothing. In fact, Mr. Alfred Carter, who was the ranch manager, he was down at the office to take a plane back to Kamuela. And I said, Mr. Carter, you're going on this plane, why don't you go, because I can go on the next plane. He said, No. He said, To have you, as a young Japanese girl to have this opportunity to take care of the people, he says, I want you to go.

You were very young to be doing that job, weren't you?

I was about twenty-six. Yeah.

And dealing with life and death, and everything in between, the worries of war.
Yeah.

That must have influenced you as a person in your later life. How do you think you changed as a result of that experience?

Well, to me, it was something that I always do anyway. I like to deal with people, to make them happy.

Besides the all expenses paid trip through thirty-seven states in three months, Shim Kanazawa also received recognition by the national office of the American Red Cross for her meritorious performance during World War II. Returning home after the war, she went to work for the Veterans Administration and set her sights on traveling to Tokyo, to work with the American Embassy. Another unforeseen force caused a change of plans, when Shim Ryusaki, as she was then known, was pursued by Kinji Kanazawa. Kinji was a community organizer credited with saving the Moiliili Community Center, formerly known as the Moiliili Japanese Language School, from government confiscation during World War II.

He had a twin brother who was one of the officers in the Veterans Administration, so I thought he was coming to see him. But no, one of the secretaries knew him and told him, Come, I want you to meet a girl from the country. [CHUCKLE] And so, that's how we met. He would come and try to talk to me, and I said, No, no, I'm not interested. And he would invite me to other functions, and I said, No, I don't want to go. Until one of the girls who worked with me knew him and said, You come and see me. And so, he went to see her, and that's how she introduced me to Kinji. [CHUCKLE]

You already knew him, but then she introduced you?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Now, at that time, most women were channeled into marriage.

Yeah.

And weren't looking to go to another country for a job assignment.

Yeah, yeah.

So you were unusual.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

And you didn't even let him down easy. You said, I don't want to do that.

No. [CHUCKLE]

You didn't say, I'd love to some other time, no, no, no.

Yeah.

What was the connection between you, do you think?

He was so good to me, and he had the same kind of feeling that I had for people. He would do anything for the sake of helping people.

Shim and Kinji Kanazawa moved to Boston shortly after their marriage. Kinji took part in an accelerated law program for two years at Boston College. Shim attended the Chamberlain School of Retailing, and later worked in stores with the hope of someday opening a bridal shop. Upon the couple's return to Hawaii, Shim went to work instead at Sears, McInerney, and Liberty House. She later taught retail training at various public high schools. Along the way, she and Kinji raised son Sidney, and daughter Joanie. For the past fifty years, Shim Kanazawa has spent countless volunteer hours on boards and commissions. She was the first Nisei woman on the board of Aloha United Way, and the first woman

director and chair of the board of Kuakini Medical Center. She was the driving force who brought about the State Executive Office on Aging, and she was appointed to the National Advisory Committee on Aging by President Carter. Project Dana, an interfaith program, is an example of one of her many pioneering efforts to assist and advocate for Hawaii's kupuna.

Project Dana is helping people, especially those who want to stay in their own place, to help the elderly to remain in their place that they want to stay as long as possible. The person who really does that in Honolulu is Mrs. Rose Nakamura. And she is the one that with a very small office help, is able to carry on this big job that she has. And for her to do that as a volunteer is something very special.

You've served under five governors in the aging field. How long are you going to keep serving in the Executive Office of Aging?

I'm still there. I go once a month to a meeting, because when Governor Cayetano made the proclamation, he said that I go to the meeting, but don't miss a meeting. [CHUCKLE]

You've been doing this active participation ever since the days of Governor Bill Quinn.

Yeah. I thought I was going back to school, University. But Governor Quinn made me chair, the Family Life and Law Committee with Judge Betty Vitousek as vice-chair. So she and I worked with the legislators, and then we were instrumental in getting the Family Court System of Hawaii. So I never went back to the University. But the University gave me a ...

Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree.

Yeah. They gave me that.

I would say so. I mean, look at what you've done. When you look back at your life, I mean, you look back at the span of your life and the things you've done, your particular special role during martial law, helping to start Family Court in Hawaii, pioneering work with aging, what do you think? As you look back, what do you think of your life?

When my daughter and my son are together, I thought I'll tell them that when I pass on [CHUCKLE] to have different people do different things for me.

[CHUCKLE]

You mean, take up the role you've played? But you need more than one person to do all this stuff.

No, no, no. [CHUCKLE]

So you want to just make sure that the work keeps going on?

That's it.

So you've never really retired up here; right?

No. No.

Will you ever?

I don't think so. I think I will always be doing things for other people.

What's the toughest thing about aging, from your perspective, right now?

I think we need more people to really look at aging, and to give them, I think, more than just recreation. Education and other things, so that the older people stay occupied and maybe ... keep themselves young.

You have no trouble keeping yourself young.

No.

How do you do it?

So far, I've been very happy, because I have a wonderful family, and my grandchildren are doing very well now, and my friends are all so good to me. And I think all of that makes my life very easy.

Why do you think you're so positive?

Maybe I'm not that kind of a person that worries too much. Because whatever happens, it happens.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever given to a friend or family member?

Be yourself, and do good to others.

At the time this conversation was taped in 2012, Shim Kanazawa was about to turn ninety-seven. Named a Living Treasure of Hawaii by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, she continues to serve and honor her island community. Thank you, Shimeji Kanazawa, for sharing your Long Story Short. And thank you for watching and supporting PBS Hawaii. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.

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There's nothing in your remembrances about anger, hostility, bad people?

No.

Cruelty?

No. All of my friends and my family, and everybody, has been really extra special to me. And I really appreciate all of that.

You must encounter people who are rude, have ulterior motives, but you don't take it to heart?

No. No; I just turn them around. [CHUCKLE]

You turn them around; how do you do that? I'd like to know that skill. How do you do it?

I just look at the good side of them, and try to make them come along.