

GUEST: WILL HENDERSON: LIFE LESSONS

LSS 710 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 11/19/13

I swept in at a time when there was a big cultural change that had taken place here from *Haole* running everything to now all of a sudden it's young, inexperienced Japanese, our 442nd heroes and the likes of that. And life changed totally in this community.

At ninety - two years of age, Will Henderson has seen a lot of changes in the world. Today this retired Hawai'i healthcare executive is still working out -- at two gyms -- and still willing to share advice with up - and - comers. Will Henderson, 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. Will Henderson grew up in poverty and isolation on the plains of South Dakota and worked in the sawmills of Oregon to pay for college. Through hard work and education he bettered his circumstances and earned a Master's Degree in hospital management, which was a brand - new field in the 1950's.**

In Hawaii, the year 1959 was a milestone as we became the 50th state. With the Democratic Revolution of 1954, the leadership and status quo throughout the islands began to change. This was the backdrop as Will Henderson, a young hospital executive from the UCLA Medical Center, was recruited to save the struggling Kauhaleolani Children's Hospital. While Will came to Hawaii intending to make major changes to the hospital, it was the people of Hawaii who forever changed his life.

I think I can say this without even a second thought. Everything I am and everything I've learned, I learned in Hawaii. Because it brought a whole new dimension to my life that I didn't know anything about. Different cultures, different beliefs, different religions, different lifestyles that I had never seen or anything. I was somehow or another fortunate to get into a new career that was being developed in the United States and that was hospital management. And we had the opportunity of seeing things so differently than in Hawaii. Hawaii was magnificent, lovely place but fifteen to twenty years behind in healthcare,

in every ... every aspect. And the opportunity then of coming here ... what a magnificent gift. What a magnificent challenge.

Will Henderson's first challenge in Hawai'i was getting the troubled Children's Hospital out of bankruptcy. With strict financial controls and his new approach to hospital management, things began to turn around rather quickly.

It started with the medical staff. And I was saying to the medical staff - the President of the medical staff was a big strapping young guy in pediatrics and I said to him we've got to find a way to make this hospital whole again. And I said, medical staff is the key. If you don't bring in patients, it doesn't make any difference what you do, we cannot succeed. And so magnificent as he was - he was with Straub Clinic, he said we will back you up. We'll work with you. And we started then. In nine months we recovered the hundred thousand dollars we owed the bank.

In 1961, Will Henderson became President and CEO of The Queen's Hospital, a post that he would hold until his retirement in 1983. Will set out to update Queen's into the modern health care center that is today.

And so, a *malihini* was put in charge of a medical center founded with a mission to provide quality health services to improve the welfare and well-being of the Native Hawaiian people, and all the people of Hawaii. But it has a Native Hawaiian mission.

Yeah.

Started by royalty, Queen Emma --

We were -- at a hundred and one years, we were a long way from your description. A long, long way from it. Mind you the healthcare system here in the hospitals -- not saying the doctors, saying the -- in the hospitals, twenty -- twenty years behind time.

Mm.

There was nothing going on that every person knows today. There was not a single intensive care unit in this community when I came here. Everybody is treated in outpatient care now. I started that hel -- outpatient care in this community in hospitals, never done. Well, it's about 19 ... 67, 68.

Are you saying that it was all or nothing, they either took you as a patient to stay over, or they didn't treat you?

You went to a doctor's office. That was the only place you got treated. Not in outpatient. Or you could have gone to the Queen Emma's Clinics.

Mm.

But most patients were not going there. Those --

Did you have trauma --

-- were free patients --

-- centers? You know, you know the word trauma --

No trauma center.

Oh.

No. But we did have a -- at Queen's, an emergency department, but it was not a trauma center. It was a far cry from that.

So, did you ...

[CLEARS THROAT]

-- help bring it along to make up those twenty years of lag?

We changed it. We redirected from a hospital, and started the move toward a medical center.

Through Will Henderson's leadership, The Queen's Hospital was transformed into The Queen's Medical Center in 1967. Will credits his success at Queen's and in Hawai'i to the multicultural friendships he made. Not only did his new friends acquaint him with the island lifestyle and the Pacific Asian cultures, they also accepted Will into their families. In turn, Will embraced and accepted their cultures as well as their families.

As you know a lot of people, who come to ... who have had great success other places and come to Hawaii to take jobs - often it's not their cup of tea. They don't cut into the culture -- they have a hard time fitting in, they ... some feel unwelcome. This may not be true, I mean I'm not making a gross generalization, but this has been a pattern of sorts.

It is true. It is very true because I had a problem keeping executives here because their wife would be very unhappy, and they'd go back.

But what made it so easy for you?

I swept in at a time when there was a big cultural change that had taken place here from *Haole* running everything to now all of a sudden it's young, inexperienced Japanese, our 442nd heroes and the likes of that. And life changed totally in this community whether most people realize it or not. But when you're integrated into the total society, you see things much differently. And it's with great pride that I became close friends with all of these people whether they are Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, whatever it might be ... many, many close friends. And so I got here and a doctor by the name of doctor David Pang, he's a pediatrician.

He delivered me.

Well then you, he did the right thing at the right time because he delivered me as well.

How so?

Thirty eight years old I didn't know a single thing about getting along anyplace in Hawaii. He told me, he took me under his wing and he started counseling me about all kinds of circumstances and individual things to be aware of. Dr. David Pang was my friend 'til the very day of his death and he always kept advising me and I would constantly thank him for doing this and he said, I didn't do anything for you. And then now I got the Hawaii side I mean the Hawaiian side

and I sorta got the Chinese side and my very first close friend was Dr. Clifford Kobayashi, pediatrician again that came in and he had four daughters, four little girls and I became a part of that family and today I'm still family with them. As a matter of fact, I just talked to mother yesterday. All of a sudden, I have a cadre of people taking care of me and showing me how to get along in this community and I still didn't know I'm supposed to be working with *haoles* all the time. Now you can chuckle about that, but it's a problem.

So that's, and it really did boil down to a Caucasian triumvirate ya know a ruling party.

It was at that time. Absolutely everything was. But I had friends that came along and involved on the *haole* side as well. Couple of them being legislators and early on I met - I had a telephone call from a senator. And that senator later I met him. Became very good friends. I'm very fond of him and his wife -- George Ariyoshi. George Ariyoshi was a wonderful friend to me, helped me in many ways. If nothing just being a friend in a Japanese controlling community now. And so as I just progressed through each of these groups. Think about to be a *haole* in this community at a time that it had changed from being run by *haoles* and now basically Japanese democratic party is in control of everything. So now I'm sitting pretty good eh ...

Sounds like it.

I got the community, I'm acquainted with all the community and everything. But now when you take Queen's, now Queen's Medical Center, it's almost one hundred percent *haole* board and many of the people, so finally I got a young Chinese lady on the board. And then there a couple more that we managed to bring onto the board. Now I have to say to you on my board, there was no prejudice. They ... they were -- I think between somewhere in the system, someone dealt out a hand of cards that said look okay you're Chinese, you're Japanese you're this and you all meet together and work together.

Will Henderson retired after 22 years as the President and CEO of The Queen's Medical Center. For many years in retirement he continued to serve on Boards and in community leadership positions. Over the years he has had an audience with world leaders such as the Crown Prince of Japan, the Queen of Thailand, and the King of Jordan. Will also spends his time passing on his wisdom to aspiring or successful business and community leaders.

You -- you're known for mentoring people. You're generous with your time and your wisdom. You take time to listen, and you make some very strategic comments. What kind of advice are you giving out these days? Can you give us an example?

[CLEARS THROAT] First, let me say that I have fifty - one protégés. Two of them became multi multimillionaires. I made it a specific effort to bring Japanese women into the healthcare field and -- and to provide opportunity for them. And so at this time, I have an array of -- I have about ten of my protégés that

I'm still in very close touch with, one in Connecticut, just retired, he was a hospital executive. Oh ... one of the local boys that I'm very proud of is Gary Kajiwara at --

President and CEO of Kuakini Medical Center. Who says you arranged for a special internship for him, which really set the stage for what he does now.

Yes.

And has done for decades.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Absolutely. And he was at Queen's Medical Center; he was a capable young man. And so I'm proud of him today. Quite proud of him. I think he's my only remaining protégé in the healthcare field, if I'm not mistaken.

Well, what do you tell people? I mean, how do you give them new tools to succeed?

Leslie, I would be misleading you if I went into a big story about how I do and what I do. One thing. I come up, I pat you on the back, and I tell you, You know what, you're doing a great job.

Even if you're not? [CHUCKLE]

Even if you're not. So really, you gotta start with -- most ... most people need someone to stand beside them. And I'm a great one to walk up and put my arm around you and say, You know what, you're really looking good today, you're looking great. And women, the same way and each of those people are -- are so appreciative that -- that I think it doesn't make any difference how much you think you have grown up in family, et cetera. Every person needs a pat on the back that simply says that you're doing a good job. Secondly, and yet there is another one; I set very high expectations for them. Very high. Beyond -- they will say, I can't do that, I'm not capable of all of that. And every one of those protégés achieved that expectation.

You didn't get a lot of pats on the back when you were a kid. There wasn't a lot of affection at all in your family.

No.

Too much hard work.

Or among any of the families. They -- we all grew up without --

Yeah.

-- without praise and --

So, you know what it's like --

Yeah.

-- to have none.

Yeah. That's why it's so important to me.

M-hm.

That, whether this -- this crew here, I pay attention to what they do, I watch them. Whomever they may be, I watch them. I selected my executives that way in my training programs. I created a whole training program that was called Vertical Horizontal Participative Management, and taught my people

what that meant. Most people do not know what that means. And taught them what that meant. And those people, so many of them have gone on to be very, very successful, not only in Hawaii, but onto the mainland, and et cetera. It was always to be there for them. If I would say, I'll be your mentor, I'm your mentor, and I am there twenty - four hours a day for you.

And so, they can come to you with any little problem, something they might consider big, but you don't.

M - hm.

But you'll help them with it?

Always listen; always listen. And I try never -- depending. Try never to tell; them what you should do. Say, you know, somethi -- have you thought about this? Have you done any long - range thinking?

And what do you get out of mentoring people?

Ah; the greatest excitement, satisfaction. I do it for free; I do it for free. Not only I would do it for free, but I do it for free.

Will Henderson still keeps a sharp eye on the changing social - economic climate of Hawai'i and he still contributes advice when younger people seek it.

So it's a magnificent time of life, and a trying time of life.

It's a trying time of life?

Yes, it is.

How so?

Well, think about it. We're all in the recession again. Many, many people have lost their homes. Many, many people have migrated from Hawaii to the mainland and to other places. Many of our Hawaii graduates cannot get jobs. In the last two weeks, I've talked to at least ten. I tell them to take any kind of a job you can get; doesn't matter what it is. Work at night, and then still try to do their job hunting in the daytime and --

Mm.

And I've tried to also to explain to them, This is the one time in your life you're going to learn to give back. And that is, you go to someone who has a company, you really want to work in their company, and do as I did. I worked for free. You tell them, I'll work for a year for free if you'll give me an opportunity for a job in your company, I'm the first one that comes along. They won't know what to think with a -- coming from a young graduate, that you are saying, I will work for free. Because, you see, our young graduates, they'll work for free for years. They walked out and got a job any time, any place.

M - hm.

And more power to them. But that is a downside that's now in our society, and we're back, this is the repeat, life repeats itself, history repeats itself.

M - hm.

So, what I grew up in, these young people are going to have more. But their parents have lost their home, parents have lost their jobs, parents can't get a

job because now they're now forty - five, fifty years old, et cetera. It's a trying time --

If you were to see Will Henderson doing his fitness routine, you'd have a hard time believing he's in his nineties. In fact, he may be in better physical shape than many people who are but a fraction of his age.

I saw this amazing picture of you. It was an article written about you when you were eighty - eight years old, and you were doing a one - handed pushup with a twist, and holding onto like a twenty or thirty-pound ball with the other hand.

[CHUCKLE]

And you were eighty - eight.

Yes.

And like, that happens every day?

That happens every day. Still happens. I --

Tell us about your fitness routine, and how long you've done it.

Well, basically, fitness isn't just working out in the gymnasium, so to speak of. But I -- I've sort of been on that side of it; track, basketball, been a lifeguard, and then hanging out on the beach for twenty - two years here in Hawaii with all of the guys. And I got pure evidence that I did that, 'cause I get those skin cancers --

Mm.

-- In the da -- I go in to the doctor, et cetera. And so, you do -- it -- it's important to do something all of the time. And if you do, you'll be surprised what you could do at ninety years of age. And so, I've ha -- long had two separate programs. I have one at home that I do every morning; and that is a stretch program, and then these rubber band things that you work with.

M - hm.

I work with those. I have a *lanai* that's a hundred and eighty feet around, so I -- I do a run four or five mornings a week. Not very far; enough to support flexibility, et cetera. And then, I ride the elevator down, and I walk up twelve flights of stairs without stopping. And that's my morning exercise. But I go to the Honolulu Club and to a second club that I have joined. They're quite different, even though they are fitness clubs. In the Honolulu Club, I work out more with weights and multiple machines that work many different parts of your body. And I imagine you could still work to develop muscle, but when you're this old, you've lost your muscle and a lot of your strength, so you always work within what your muscles can do and what your -- what weights you can lift, and the likes of that. Yeah, and --

What about the other gym?

The other one's exactly the same thing. But it's very small, it's quiet, and the payoff is, I can go there, and in forty - five minutes complete a workout. It's an hour and a half to two hours.

Because you chat, or because you have to wait --

All the time.

-- for machines?

You've got all of your friends, and you -- yeah, and that's a great part of my social life now, because I have stopped and gotten off of all of the board of directors I've been on, and all of the groups that I participated in. An -- and I -- I've brought it home to -- my commitment is to health; my health and your health. If I see friends that -- I won't badger them, but I will suggest to them that you should be doing an exercise program --

M - hm.

-- for your health, and the likes of that. But there's a payout, an unexpected payout.

What is it?

You've got all of these handsome, husky guys that are around there, and these ladies. They're -- some of them have been there for thirty years with me. And they are fit, and they're in good shape, and they are marvelous. And they come up to you and say ... You're my hero, you're my idol, I want to be just like you. Some of 'em, the chuckle [INDISTINCT] are the ones that come up and about -- they're overweight, and the likes of that. And they said, When I am your age, I want to be just like you. [CHUCKLE]

But the way you get to be your age is to --

It's a long trip --

-- be working out.

-- for them. [CHUCKLE]

So, you've always maintained a fitness regimen?

No, not in the way that I do it now. But I was always sort of in athletics, and swimmer. And so, you get to the point that you're committed. And it takes that commitment. And it becomes a joy that you are out there, and you still ... can race the bus at ninety years old.

[CHUCKLE]

[CHUCKLE] I gave that one up.

[CHUCKLE] **But you were doing it until recently?**

Yeah.

Racing the bus.

Two years ago, last time.

Do you feel ninety - two? I guess -- do you feel the way you felt when you were sixty - two or forty - two?

Feel better.

Feel better.

Think about it; I feel better.

And his mental shape, equally better. Mahalo to Will Henderson for sharing his story with us -- and mahalo to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou.

For audio and written transcripts of all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit PBSHawaii.org. To download free podcasts of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, go to the Apple iTunes Store, or visit PBSHawaii.org.

I was in my car and stopped at a red light and a lady rear ended me and almost killed me. And so my recovery started by going to Honolulu Club. These big husky guys would come along and grab me by the seat of the pants and get me up on my feet -- cause I couldn't get up off the bench -- and get me up on my feet and say, you look wonderful. You look great!