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When I was sixteen years old, I was chosen homecoming queen for Roosevelt. It was a real exciting time. We were going to be playing Punahou at the old Stadium.

Your arch rival.

I know. [CHUCKLE] Arch rival. [CHUCKLE] And my mother was supposed to buy me a dress. I was going to ride around the stadium in the Schuman Carriage, and I was going to ride around with a horse. And I was so excited about it; it was on the front page of the news and everything. And so, my mother says, Well, before we do that, we gotta go pick up a necklace I had made. And she said it was the name of her book; and it was an obscene name. And we go to Kahala Mall, Liberty House. We go in, she goes into the fine jewelry department, and I hear the lady behind the counter say, Sorry, Mrs. Hicks, but management wouldn't let us make your necklace. She was so mad. She goes up the escalator, throws off her clothes, and goes down the other side of the escalator. Naked.

Totally in the nude. And she sees a guard down there, and she sees the guard and she backs up. She sees another guard, and she's going up and down, really enjoying herself. And she was pretty; she was thirty - nine years old, beautiful shape. And pretty soon, one guard yells to the other, Well, how do you grab a naked lady?

Sharon Hicks never forgot that day. When she started writing her memoir many years later, she went to a workshop and told another author about the incident. The other writer said, Sharon, there's the title for your book; How Do You Grab A Naked Lady? Sharon Hicks shares the drama of growing up with her mother's mental illness, 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. If you grew up in Hawaii, especially during the late 1950s through the 60s when construction was booming, you may remember the many house lots that were fronted by signs saying, Hicks Homes.

Before Harold Hicks moved his family to Hawaii to start his construction company, he lived in Los Angeles where his daughter Sharon Hicks was born. During those early years, there already were signs that something was different about Sharon's mother.

She'd lock me out of the house, or she'd lock me in closets. It was like, out of sight, out of mind.

How old were you?

I would say four or three; three or four years old.

And you'd be out in the yard?

Yeah; just outside.

Or in a closet?

Yeah; she'd lock me in the closet.

For how long?

I don't remember that; I just remember being locked away.

Your brother had a different situation at a young age. He was tied to the clothesline?

[CHUCKLE] Yes. Isn't that something? But he liked it. What he didn't like was eating his cereal in the morning, and if he didn't eat that oatmeal, he had it for lunch, and then he had it for dinner. And he said it was awful. He had to finish his oatmeal. After breakfast, he would run outside and stand by the clothesline, waiting to be tied up. And she had a harness, and she'd put the hook on it, and he had the length of the clothesline to play. And he said there was a kid on the other side of the fence that he'd peek through the fence and talk to once in a while.

And a certain point, he got banished from the house.

Yes; he had to sleep downstairs in the garage.

And how old was he then?

Ten.

And there were rats in the garage?

Yes. He told me; he said, Sharon, don't tell Mother there's rats downstairs in my bedroom. Don't tell her. And I said, Oh, I won't. And so, what am I, ten? I'm ... Six.

Six. And so, I went up; Mother [CHUCKLE], David has rats in his room. I was just telling her, 'cause he doesn't want to sleep down there. And then, I'd go down there with him, and we'd sit on the top bunk, and he had a BB gun, and I wanted him to show me the rats. And he did. And he would fire his this gun at the rats. They were huge. My brother's thinking was, it made him very strong.

So, he found a positive in it.

Yes; made him very strong.

When you're a child, you don't know what childhood and family life is supposed to be, so maybe you would think it's not so odd that my mom sends me outside or locks me in a closet. Maybe that's what has to happen.

I know it. And I did compare my mother to the ladies next door, the mothers next door. And what really bothered me the most about the ladies next door, that they would buy things at the store that my mother wouldn't buy. Isn't that interesting? I used to think about that, because my mother would never buy packaged cereals, packaged cookies, anything in packages. Everything was fresh, everything was homemade. This was in California; I was real young. I went to the Park houses next door; they had packaged cookies, and there was cereal you could pour in a bowl, and it was just totally different. And I thought, Oh, this is interesting.

M - hm. But that's the big difference you saw. [CHUCKLE]

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

But clearly, your mother wasn't like other mothers.

No. Saturday nights were great, because she gave parties. And she was beautiful, again. Everything was the linens, and the silver, the china in those days. And then, you made things, you made the rolls, handmade rolls, you made the pies. And then, she entertained. And she did it all. She could play the piano, and sing.

So, you enjoyed that?

Yes; 'cause she was happy, and the house was happy. Full of happy people.

Sharon Hicks was ten when her family moved to Hawaii. That's when her father started his construction company, building more than twenty thousand homes and becoming one of Hawaii's top builders, ever.

My dad graduated from high school when he was fifteen, and he was raised in Los Angeles. At ten years old, though, he was selling newspapers on the corner, and he was telling the johns where the girls were. He was always working it. He graduated at fifteen, went to work for a company called May Company. He became a buyer of women's clothes. And then, he wanted to open up his own stores, women's stores, so he got a contractor's license. He built them himself, right there on Broadway in Los Angeles; had two stores called Carolyn's Apparel, after my mother. And he liked that, but then my uncle called from Hawaii and said, I need you over here as a contractor. And that's when we came in 1950. And the business concept he had was, what? What did Hicks Homes do? He wanted people to be able to choose a design for their houses. For instance, if you walked into Sears and wanted that refrigerator, I want that refrigerator in my home; same type of concept. He had about thirty designs, and you chose your design. No changes in those days. So, all the roofs were white, so nothing got confused. [CHUCKLE]

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

And the windows, he had oak floors and redwood walls, and everything. It was quality built, but because it was pre - designed, it was affordable.

There was a time when there were Hicks Homes everywhere. I remember all the signs that say, This is a Hicks Homes under construction. And yes, white roofs, and I recall Aina Haina.

Right.

And you say he was on all the islands.

M - hm. And his company was called Hicks Construction Company; never Hicks Homes. But he was building so many homes, a hundred a month, that people said, I live in a Hicks Home.

That's true.

And that's how it started. [CHUCKLE]

He did that for how many years?

He started in 1954, incorporated in '54, and he died in 1967. Not very long. But in 2006, the Building Industry Association inducted him into their Hall of Fame as the most influential contractor of the past fifty years.

He made it possible for regular people to build their own home without having to hire a lot of people.

And other contractors liked his method, and they adopted it too.

So, you're a girl growing up with her brother who's four years older, in East Honolulu.

M - hm. When we first moved here, Mother threw a party, and she invited everybody. And she came out of her bedroom three times in three different negligees; see - through negligees. One was white, one was black, and one was pink. And she always had her teddy bear, and she'd come out to greet the guests. And they were totally see - through. I'm ten years old, and I'm going, Oh, my gosh, what's going on? My dad invites somebody to the party who was a friend of his at the Lions Club, but he's also a doctor. So, he comes, and he's watching my mother, and my mother's snuggling up to him, 'cause he's so handsome. And finally, he comes to me and he said, Sharon, let's go next door. So, we go next door. He says, I'm going to call Kaneohe State Mental Hospital. They're gonna come with a wagon, all the men are going to be in white, they're gonna strap your mother down. She's not gonna like it, she's gonna scream. We're taking her to Kaneohe Mental Hospital because she's sick. And when I heard the words, She's sick, I thought ... Wow, then she can get better, this is wonderful news.

Sharon Hicks loved her mother, and longed for more of her mom's attention. But her mother was getting worse, not better. For her mother, that trip to Kaneohe was the first of what would become a lifetime of hospitalizations, medications, and even arrests.

She did have shock treatments?

Oh; many. Many. In those days, there was no muscle relaxant, so she said it was like laying on a train track and having a train hit you head - on. And everything was white. She described the room as white, the doctors were in white, the sheets were white. And when the electric hit you, it was just white. You know, and she said it was just awful.

Did psychiatric medication work for her? She had schizophrenia.

M - hm.

And bipolar. But was it possible to control her illness with medication?

They tried. But she ... it was awful. She'd take ice cubes and rub her arms like this, and she'd pace, and she'd vomit.

It was harsh medication.

Yes.

Especially in the early days.

Yes; lithium. She didn't get the correct dose. They had to work with you to get the correct dosage, and she didn't want to do that, 'cause it was awful. And why would you want to take medication anyway, when you're having so much fun?

When your mother came home from the hospital after shock treatments, what was she like?

Like a zombie. She didn't remember where things were in the house. I remember having to drive in the car with her, and I'm young, ten or eleven years old, telling her what grocery store we go to, what bank we go to, how to shop. Come home, help her figure out even how to chop carrots.

You were the first homecoming queen at Roosevelt.

And most ideal.

And most ideal.

[CHUCKLE]

And yet, your home life was not to be envied. And you're worried about what other people think, possibly. And I can just say that when I was a kid, I lived about mile and a half down the road from you on the other side of Kalaniana'ole Highway. And one day, the kids in the neighborhood say, Hey, guess what? Mrs. Hicks is out on the highway naked, with a salad bowl on her head. Come on! And everybody headed out to the highway to look at your mom with a salad bowl, naked. I didn't know you, I didn't know the family at all, but I thought, Wow, I wonder if she has kids, I wonder what her family thinks. It didn't connect at all with your father, the prominent builder, the nice house on the shore at Niu. And then, the beautiful parties your mother could throw, but then this deteriorating personal life with outrageous behavior. What was it like to be in the house with her?

It was like walking on pins and needles, 'cause I never knew what she was going to do. I never knew when I came home from school what she was going to be like. When I was a junior at Roosevelt, I wanted to throw a party. We had lots of good parties in those days. We'd crash each other's high school. I was gonna have the party of all parties. 'Cause my brother was very popular, and I thought, I'm gonna have a party and be popular. So, I went in and I said, Mom, I want a party. And she said, No. It's too noisy, I don't want kids around, I don't want them in the house using the bathroom, I don't want anybody here. So, I said, Okay. So, I was real upset, and I go into my bedroom. My father follows me in and he said, Sharon, you have to learn how to ask the question. I said, What do you mean? You have to make it about her. It's not you, but go back in there and say, Mother, I understand it might be too noisy, and it might upset you, but I really would like to have a party if we follow certain rules. But make it about it her. I did that, and it worked. [CHUCKLE]

And wasn't that what your whole childhood was about?

Yes.

It was about her.

It was about her. I had to figure out how I was gonna get something, but I had to make it about her first.

When you came home from school, did she say, How was your day?

No.

Did you get your homework done?

Oh, no. Nothing about that. I don't remember her going to PTA meetings, or anything, or going and talking to my teachers, or anything.

Instead, you kind of got home and, you said you could sense when a crazy period was coming on, just like you can sense rain coming.

Yes. And you know what I did too was, I took piano lessons since I was in sixth grade, classical piano. So, when I came home, I practiced. And that was my out. I'm sorry, I'm practicing, Mother. But she had such an ear, a tone for music that she'd say, Sharon, wrong note. [CHUCKLE] She's be yelling at me. But that was like an out, and I loved playing the piano. And my girlfriends would be waiting out in the yard for me to play, and I'm sitting there playing. But I think that was an escape, a way of just tuning her out. I didn't know what kind of mood she was in, I didn't care, I'm practicing my piano.

And she kind of thought everybody else was a dummy; right?

M - hm.

Besides her.

Exactly. Very smart; and she was smart.

Were you afraid of her?

Yes. But, she never really did beat me or anything, but I was afraid of her.

More neglect, than anything?

Well, I just didn't know what was gonna happen. One of my friends, a next door neighbor was saying that they remember her chasing my dad down Kalaniana'ole with a broom. [CHUCKLE] Right down the middle of the highway with this broom after him. I just remember her sitting at the table, and she reached across the table and scratched my dad's face really bad once. Just out of nowhere. And you think, Where'd that come from? So, I just never knew. And besides being locked in closets and being locked outside, and things like that, I don't remember really hitting me or anything like that. But it was an abuse. But I never thought of it as an abuse, which is interesting.

When Sharon Hicks talks about her mother, she recounts bewildering, embarrassing, and sad times; but there's always an undercurrent of love and attachment. Still, Sharon Hicks looked forward to taking a break from her mother and her unpredictable home life when she went off to the mainland for college. Her father would eventually leave the marriage.

Your father did stick with your mom for a long time.

Yes.

Just throughout hospitalizations and embarrassments. And I know people who have mania are often hypersexual. It's one of the traits.

Exactly.

And it might have helped your parents' marriage, you mention, but it also probably was the last straw for him, because it was indiscriminate hypersexuality.

M - hm. And that's what ended it for him. When I graduated from college at Long Beach State, they both came to see me graduate. And I know she was on a manic; I could just see it. You could see it in her eyes.

What does it look like?

Her eyes just start to flitter, and you can just tell that she's headed for mania. My dad found a hospital for her called Westwood Hospital. So, I go see my mom, and my mom said, [GASP] Sharon, you won't believe what happened, I got caught. And I said, What do you mean? I got caught with a night nurse.

You knew your mother already had flings?

M - hm. And when I saw my dad after that, and we were walking away from the hospital, he said, Sharon, I can't do this anymore. I'm just so tired. And then, he said, I can divorce your mother, but I don't know about your brother and you.

How do you divorce a parent? So, that was a good question. I went, Yeah, how do you? [CHUCKLE]

Yeah; because what happens to you now.

Yeah.

Right?

Yeah. And all of a sudden, David and I are her trustees, and we're in charge. But you know, we step up to the plate and we say, Dad, you be happy, you've been through a lot.

And then you controlled a sum of money that was used for her support.

M - hm. Right. Because we knew if she controlled it, it would be gone.

Sharon Hicks felt that she needed to find a husband, not only to make her father happy, but to keep from returning to her mother's domain.

I married at nineteen, and I was marrying an idea, and not the person, because I wanted an escape. I thought if I married this perfect person, we'll have this perfect life, we'll live in California, and that's two thousand miles away. He was in dental school. And my dad got so excited, that he would sign blank checks and give it to my first husband to fill in the amount. Paid for our school, for his dental school, for everything.

'Cause he wanted you to have a perfect life.

Yes; this was going to be the perfect squeaky life. But I jumped into it at nineteen; I didn't know what I was -- I was a young nineteen. And then, that didn't work out, 'cause it was an abusive relationship. And I go right on to the next door neighbor where we were living in California. And I think because I was in such a dysfunctional family, I didn't know what normal might look like. I didn't have anything to judge it by, so I didn't really pick a nice normal person. I had a wonderful role model in a father, but then, he stayed. You know, he didn't say that this was wrong, so he stayed with it. So, when I found myself in an abusive relationship, I stayed longer than I probably should have.

Did you ever talk with your father about it?

Oh, no; I couldn't. My father died while I was married to the first one, and he never knew I was unhappy.

Because you wouldn't tell him.

Absolutely. He paid for everything. Beautiful wedding, everything. He bought me a husband; actually bought me a husband.

And he thought he was buying you escape.

Yes. Well, he thought he was buying me security, too. This is security; you'll never have to work, Sharon, bla - bla - bla. I'm buying you security.

So, I'll take care of you, and you'll be okay.

Yes; yeah. And I'll be with this guy. But when he was dying on his deathbed, he looked up at me and he said, Sharon, are you having any fun? That surprised me, because I thought, Fun? What is fun? [CHUCKLE] I didn't know what he was talking about.

And yet, you have such an easy laugh. You do find humor in things.

I do.

But you weren't having fun?

No; I didn't know what he meant. What do you mean, have fun? But I thought it was interesting he would say that, because I was getting security, where would fun fit into all this.

Your mom has also passed away. Did she ever say anything like that, that made you think, as she neared her own end?

Oh, all the time. I remember once sitting with her, and she said, Sharon, name me one happy couple; just one. And I had a hard time thinking. [CHUCKLE] I'd name some. Oh, no, no, they're not happy. Or she would say things like, There's no such thing as a victim, you volunteer to be a victim. Victim equals volunteer; just remember that. Another one I loved was, need is not love. Because you need somebody doesn't mean you love them. If you love them, you don't need them. She'd throw things out like that all the time, and I'd sit there and I'd be thinking about it, then I'd go home and I'd come back and talk to her philosophically about 'em. The victim equals volunteer was one that I couldn't get a handle on. I'd say, Mother, what about babies that have cancer? What about people that really are a victim of something? And she'd have an answer. She'd always have an answer. Which was, No, you volunteer for this. And I thought, Is she volunteering being mentally ill? Is she volunteering to get electrodes strapped to her skull and getting electric shot through her body? Is she volunteering for this?

She never had any moments where she talked about her situation and the trouble she caused, or the pain she felt?

Oh, yes. And she would cry. But then, she was the victim. Nobody understood her, and she'd cry and say, Sharon, it was awful, how I got treated. It was just awful.

Most people don't have the resources your family did at that time. Was there something to find that could help?

That's difficult. And in those times, there weren't that many as there are today. I don't remember even national organizations or therapy groups or anything. And in those days in the 1950s and 60s, it was tough if you were labeled mentally ill. And it wasn't 'til 1983 was there a committee formed called Truth in Psychiatry, where a patient had to consent to a shock treatment. Before that, patients never consented. And it didn't happen in all states. I remember in 1980, she was saying, Sharon, there's this new committee formed, that a patient has to consent to a shock treatment, and they want me to testify, but I can't get it together. I don't want to testify, she'd say. I want it, but I can't get my act together. But that committee was formed so people did have civil rights and could say, No, I choose not to have shock treatments. But before then, you had shock treatments.

Sharon Hicks moved back to Hawaii with her four children after her second divorce. She became the executive director of several nonprofit organizations

before taking over the Hicks Construction Company. After she retired, she was able to finish her memoir, *How Do You Grab A Naked Lady?*

You probably couldn't have written this book when you were younger. You need a lot of insights to process all of this stuff.

I was always going to write it. And I thought I could do it when I was younger. I kept notes. And when incidences happened, I'd write it down, and I had a great big box of all these notes. And I had an idea it was going to fall together. Because it's a memoir, you told about how she affected your life.

I was always gonna do her story. 'Cause I always thought she had a wasted life. My dad was very well respected. He was loyal, he was a pillar of the community, he belonged to different clubs, he was always out there doing things. But I don't ever remember my mother doing anything for the community. So, I thought, I'm gonna write this story, because it will help others. And it is. My mother lived out loud. And in writing this book in this same out - loud voice, it's becoming a benchmark for other people. Now they're starting to share their stories with me, and it's opening up doors to talk about the stigma of mental illness.

You're a grandmother; a great - grandmother.

Yes.

And this book is gonna make some of the younger kids' eyes open wide. Why do you want it out there?

I wanted to honor my mother in a way. It shows how she was treated in the 1940s and 50s, all the way up to the year 2000. It shows a history of how mental illness has progressed, and the pendulum has swung from, she had no civil rights, just hospitalized and given shock treatments without her consent, to over here, where it's just the opposite.

Do you think she could have been helped? Because nobody really could grab a naked lady, all through the book. [CHUCKLE]

She didn't want help.

So, if you don't want help, then it's hard to help somebody who doesn't want it. She didn't, 'cause she didn't think anything was wrong.

And did anyone really grab or get a hold of the naked lady?

Whenever they put a sheet on her, or a blanket, she'd throw it off again. She just felt like she had nothing to hide. [CHUCKLE]

And you can laugh about it. Could you always laugh about it?

Uh ... no. No, but I have to, because the stories are funny, and you can't write a book and have it be a downer all the time. It's life.

Because you did let it all go out. You didn't censor things that happened. You just said, Here's how it was.

And I was perfect before I wrote the book. I was really perfect. I'm the perfect daughter, bla - bla. And I'm finding I am more like her [CHUCKLE] than I thought [CHUCKLE], and I wasn't perfect. And it was really an eye-opener for me.

Sharon Hicks' memoir was published in 2012, and her journey continues as she learns more about herself while talking with her book readers who have lived with severe mental illness in the family. *Mahalo* to Sharon Hicks of East Honolulu, loving daughter, whose mother's mental illness destabilized her own life and that of her prominent family, despite the privileges of money. And *mahalo* to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. *A hui hou.*

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What, if anything, do you miss about your childhood?

I miss the 1950s. The music, [CHUCKLE] the Jitterbug. Of course, we had Elvis Presley and Nat King Cole. I just loved the 50s, the times. And in those days, there was only five hundred thousand population total in Hawaii. So, where we lived was country. It was a great place.