

GUEST: ALICE GREENWOOD

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My father was pure Hawaiian, and so was my mother. And I remember when he did our delayed Hawaiian birth, he says, I lied throughout the whole thing. So I says, Why, Dad? He says, Because according to the State, he needed witness, so he asked his sisters to confirm that they were present at my birth. He says, But it was only me and your mom. He says, But I needed witness, so they lied throughout the whole thing. And I says, Well, that's all right, I understand. Sometimes we gotta go according to what the systems needs.

Alice Greenwood went along with the system for much of her life, even when it meant homelessness. Today, Alice is a respected advocate for environmental and social justice in the Waianae community. Alice Greenwood, 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. People become homeless for many different reasons. For Alice Greenwood, a series of unforeseen events, one thing after another, caused her to lose her home. Yet, her experience with homelessness is only a small part of her life story of resilience and discovery. Alice Ululani Kaholo Greenwood was born on Maui, the sixth of ten children. When she was five, her mother contracted tuberculosis and was sent to a sanatorium. Most of Alice Greenwood's siblings stayed on Maui with their grandmother. Alice and a brother moved to Oahu.

I was raised all over Oahu. I attended Waianae School, and that was kindergarten. Then half of kindergarten, I went to Barbers Point. Then half of that, I went -- I mean, I traveled so many different schools.

Is that because you were living with your father?

I was living with my father. He was a custodian for DOE. He worked over at Waianae Elementary, then he worked at Barbers Point. And then, they transferred him over to Kalihi, Kalihi Waena, Kalihi Uka. He always was constantly working. When he would have drinking during the weekends when he drinks with his friends, he would ask them, Oh, do you have children? Yeah. Would

you mind having one more child? He has a wife and his children, so I ended staying with them.

For how long?

Depends; sometimes for the summer. Majority was for the summertime.

So, he was drinking with guys, and he said, Would you take my little girl home with you?

Yeah. And he paid them for my upkeep and everything.

How did that make you feel?

To tell you the truth, I felt they were my aunties and uncles.

And they treated you well, all of them?

Yeah. I was part of the household.

M - hm.

Except for one incident I remember in Kalihi, when I seen the girl, the mother would always lovingly do her hair. And so, what I did for the weekend -- that's when I was going go Kalihi Uka. So, what I did is, I turned in bottles and got my own bobby pins, and tried to do my hair. And then, it didn't turn out the way it should be. And then, I realized there's a difference between my upbringing and the children that I lived with.

And what was it like for you, going to all those different schools, different areas?

It was hard; very hard. I didn't know my ABCs until I reached maybe like the fourth, fifth grade. I didn't know there was any numbers past twenty. So, it was very hard. And then, to try to put it into words was even harder for me.

Did you have anybody to talk with during this time, an adult who kind of watched out for you, besides your dad, who sometimes wasn't there all summer?

I had a sister, a stepsister that was staying with us off and on. And I spoke to her, but I didn't really have anyone I could really confide with. It was, whatever you see, that's it.

M - hm. 'Cause I saw the list of schools you attended, and there were a lot of schools. You even went all the way over to East Honolulu. And that's a major culture change. What was that like?

Talk about major cultural change. Yeah. I remember when I went to Kaimuki and Waiialae. The living condition was so much different. I seen children with beautiful dresses. I seen the girls with beautiful dresses, crinolines. Like, it was an envy for me. And the type of shoes I had were oxford, the oxford shoes. So, when I looked at that, I was like, I wish I could be like them.

And the families didn't share and share alike with you? You were sort of the guest, you brought your own stuff?

Yeah. Majority of the times, I brought whatever hand - me - downs, whatever I had.

And I don't know your dad, but a lot of guys wouldn't be into buying -- they don't know what to buy. Maybe now, they're more in tune, but in those days ...

No; my dad, he didn't know what to buy. Sometimes, I would have clothes mismatched. Now, I look it as mismatched.

M - hm.

But at that time, I was just thankful that I had clothes.

When you built relationships in one home, it must have been hard to leave for points unknown, the next home.

Not really, 'cause I enjoyed being with my dad and my brother.

So, you leave a family home for the summer, go back to your dad and brothers, and then -- or one brother; right?

Yeah.

And then, did you dread the next summer when you'd probably have to go again?

No; I didn't look at it that way. It's like going on vacation, I guess. It was like exposing to something else. I always met different people; that's the thing.

Did you get disciplined at these homes that you stayed at for the summer?

Several times; I remember several times, we were all in a group. But it's like a neighborhood. You get yelled at; that's all your aunties and uncles.

It's the village raising you; right?

Yeah; a village raising me. Just like everybody had permission to yell at us, and everybody had permission to give us licking if we got in trouble. Yeah. It's like a family, like an *ohana* unit.

Alice Greenwood did not finish high school, choosing instead to get married. She knew early on that her husband had a privileged upbringing, and she felt culture shock when he took her to live near his family in Missouri.

I got married when I was eighteen. No; seventeen, 'cause my father had to sign the paperwork. And he was from a wealthy family. I didn't know he was from a wealthy family, and prejudiced. And I remember what had happened was, I was at Rainbow Roller Rink.

I remember Rainbow Roller Rink.

Yeah.

You weren't a skater, were you?

Well, I was trying to skate. That's how I met him. He really fell in love with my girlfriend. He got the wrong person. And he asked me for a date. And how I knew he was a wealthy person is because in Waikiki, the car stopped. It wouldn't go. So I says, Oh, all you have to do is push it on the side. So, he looked at me, he says, What do you mean, push it on the side? I said, Get out of the car, and push it on the side. I ended up pushing the car.

'Cause he wasn't used to doing that kind of thing.

No. He didn't know what to do.

But you fell in love with him?

Yeah. I fell in love with him. The reason why I fell in love with him is because he was naïve. You know. [CHUCKLE] He seemed so innocent in lot of the things that I knew about people. He seemed like he was so sheltered.

And you liked that; that was attractive to you.

Yeah. 'Cause I could control him.

Oh; is that what you liked? You liked controlling him?

Yeah. I felt like I could control him and everything. And then, the love was there. The love was there. And then, I had my son, and that was even more strength into it. Then we moved to Missouri. There was prejudice at that time. I didn't know what prejudice was. What happened was, from Poplar Bluff, Missouri, we moved to St. Louis, Missouri. And because he had to go work, I had to do all the moving. This couple stopped by and he says, Do you need help? It was a Black couple.

M - hm.

And I said, Oh, yeah, thank you. And when they helped move in. My sister - in - law seen the whole works, and they didn't help me or anything, but this couple helped me. And then the next morning, he says, My sister's calling me Boy. I wonder why she's calling me Boy. I said, Well, go check it out, maybe something's wrong with her. Then he came back and he says, I heard you had these N - words, they were in my house. And I said, No, they were in our house. So, he says, Well, I don't want them here. I says, Guess who's coming for dinner? And he says, You're not gonna have 'em in this house. See, the thing is, he did the wrong thing. He was speaking to me while I had the iron pan in my hand.

[CHUCKLE]

I was cooking breakfast. And he says, No, you're not. I says, Really? Watch this. I hit him over the head with it. He went next door, called his brother - in - law. He came over. I says, What you here for? He said, What you went do to my brother - in - law? And I said, This. And I whacked him too with the iron pan. And then, my sister - in - law came over. So, they called the cops. And I remember trying to fight with all of 'em. And the chief of police turned around and he says, Hey, you, what's the matter with you? And I looked at him, and I said, I married one of your kind. So, he helped me. He said, You know, Alice, being that your in - laws are wealthy, I would advise you to get on the plane and go back to the islands.

So, you did take that advice and get on a plane?

Yeah.

Did you ever look back?

Well, I was offered a million dollars for my son, 'cause I brought him with me. And I told them, no thank you.

Alice Greenwood met her second husband after she returned home. But a devastating accident disabled him. Eventually, the marriage disintegrated. She spent the next twenty - five years of her life with James Hatchie, a retired Marine,

who stepped into the role of father to her children. For the first time, Alice Greenwood had stability in her life, and she began to blossom in new ways.

He was my next door neighbor. And over time, he started taking care of the children too when go to work and everything. And then we got close. We never got married, you know, though we ended up staying with each other and everything. I think the whole idea was, 'cause he was on pension, and I was working, and he didn't want to give up his pension pay.

This is the former Marine.

Yeah, the Marine.

What was life like for you and him, and the kids?

He was very, very stern with the children. We had a little farm, and they had to do their chores. 'Cause he took care of them. And he was the one that did the cooking of the house, too. And he would take us camping all around the island. He would choose like, Okay, this year let's go to Waimanalo. And we'd go over there, and he would teach the children how to like, pick up *pipipi*, *opihii*, all those things. And we would be singing, and and he would tell us stories. And he was a very much matured person. But he taught me the correct things that I needed to know.

Which were?

How to raise children, for one thing. He also made sure that the rules in the house, that we all eat together. And if we have any problems, then we say it right there.

You hadn't had that kind of family structure in your life at all. So, now, your life is very stable. You share a home, and you've got a job, he's got a pension, he takes care of the kids. So, are you feeling happy at this point?

Not really, because he was an educated person. You need to get your GED. You need to know what's happening in your neighborhood, your community. And he was the person that made me an activist. Like with the birth, death, marriage certificates. It went from two dollars to ten dollars. He said, Are you going to let that happen? I said, Yes. It's one of those things, the Legislature is the one saying that we gotta do it. He said, But they want to raise it again. He said, Are you gonna let that happen? And then, when I was riding a bus coming home from attending my school over at Honolulu Community College, I seen this young girl crying, a young couple. So, I told him, Is she okay? He says, Well, with the way of the price of the birth, death, marriage certificate, we're from the Island of Niihau, and we don't know our family, but we want to get us benefits for Hawaiians, like Hawaiian Homes, education, and all that. We have to prove our lineage. He says, Ten dollars; do we pay for food, hospital bill, or for the certificate to prove we're Hawaiian? I went home and I told that to my husband, he says, Well, what are you gonna do about it? I said, I can't do nothing. He said, Go to the Legislature and fight it. So, today, that's why we only pay ten dollars. Otherwise, we'd be paying twenty - five dollars today.

You figured out how to submit the testimony, who to see, find your way around that square box of a building.

And, like I said, the hardest thing was for me to put it in words, and to put things together. But he taught me how to do it. He even taught me how to fight the courts.

And he thought you had the stuff to be a community activist, and he was right.

I don't know whether he trained me that way, or whatever it is, but he always told me; he says, If you don't ask the questions, you will never know.

James Hatchie passed away in 2001. Only one month before that, he had persuaded Alice Greenwood to raise his newly-born nephew, James Daniel Makalii Hatchie, whom she later adopted. Not long afterward, the house she had rented for thirty - five years was sold, and she could not afford the jump in rent from three hundred dollars to almost one thousand dollars a month. Her other children had grown up, moved away, and were unable to help.

In 2005, June, I became homeless. I moved down the beach; I lived at Maili Beach Park, thinking like everybody else, it was only gonna be for a little while. I didn't realize the rent, 'cause I was paying only three hundred. At five hundred ninety - nine dollars, I could afford it. But the rent was over eight hundred to a thousand dollars. So, five hundred ninety - nine dollars, I couldn't afford it. So, when I moved to Maili Beach Park, it was a pop - up tent. There was a man that was sleeping; he was homeless, and you had all the rest homeless people that were surrounding me. Anyway, when he got out of his tent, he seen me and he says, Do you have anything? And I says, No, not really. He says, I'll be back. So, he went, and he came back with breakfast, the most delicious breakfast my son and I ever ate. And you know what? It was a weekend, so my son didn't have to go to school. And then, he came back with a one - man tent. And then before you know it, everybody around there gave me some baskets, and everything. They formed a little bed inside, and then they had a stove. And he also came back with lunch. And they taught me how to live on the beach.

You found another village.

Yeah. But the problem with this is that there were drug addicts and alcoholic guys all around me.

Single woman, young boy.

But, the other part of it; even though they were on drugs and alcohol, they cared for me and my son. Especially for my son; they really cared for him. They made sure that I was protected, they ensured that I have the right things to live with.

You didn't have any trouble?

No. I had problems with the people outside that was looking in.

What kind of problem with them? Saying you can't pitch your tent over here? That kinda thing?

Yeah. They would come and harass the homeless in my area.

You're talking about official people?

Not only official, but other public people come and harass them.

Saying you shouldn't be on the beach, because we want to use the beach?

Yeah. Oh, you guys over here, how come, you guys lazy. Everything that I was calling the homeless prior before I moved down the beach, alcoholic, drug addicts, lazy people. Exactly the words they were using on me and the people that surrounds me. So, I knew what everybody was talking about. But like I said, my husband taught me, and taught me well.

One of the stories about you that is just so classic is, how you took care of the restrooms at Maili.

Yeah. See, like I said, among us, we had lot of the drug, alcoholics. We also had women that were selling themselves. And the only way they could really do it was in the bathrooms. I remember the woman next to me had brought down her two daughters. And when they used to go and take a shower at night, we had all this activity happening. And then one day, I said, No more, no more. Before the girls go to school in the morning, I am getting up four o'clock in the morning, I am cleaning that bathroom.

Were there still activities going on in the bathroom while you were cleaning?

I am cleaning up the bathroom. They didn't like it. I said, I'm sorry, but I'm cleaning up the bathroom.

So, you were in there, and you're getting in their way.

Yes.

You're discouraging them from whatever they were doing.

I ensured that I got in their way, to make sure that the bathroom was clean.

But, you were interfering with commerce; right?

Yeah.

Were you personally afraid?

No. Because the attitude of everyone, I guess, being my age and everything. Like I said, when my car broke down, they helped me. When I had my injury, going from the car to where my tent is at, I was looking at all the groceries that I need. This guy, being drunk and everything, he said, Oh, don't worry, I'll handle. And he carried the whole thing, put it on the table.

Did you limp? What was your injury?

I limped. I have a herniated disc on my neck and lower back, and it's spinal.

I would think cleaning the bathroom would be really hard on your injury.

It was. But I was looking at the children. I was looking at the two girls. All I could see was their faces. And I was determined that they were gonna have a clean bathroom.

So, what happened?

They had a clean bathroom.

People moved out, they took their business elsewhere?

Yeah; they took their business elsewhere and everything. And then, a month later, the men's bathroom was so sparkling, you wouldn't believe. In fact, before you walked in, they sprayed your leg with Pine - O.

So, did you do the men's room too?

No.

Somebody else did the ...

The men did their own.

So, they picked up and they said, That's a good idea, we're gonna do that too?

And that's what they did. And then, it ended up going into the campgrounds, where they ended up lawn - mowing, cleaning up. All the park people had to do was come over there and give us trash bags. We even put the trash bags real nice, cleaned up the parking lot.

That's a wonderful story. What's your sense of who was living there? You mentioned drug addicts and mentally ill people.

Yes.

What about people, you know, and --

And *kupuna*.

And *kupuna* who just have fixed incomes or no income.

Several times when the police officers would come, they fell short of their quota for giving tickets, and they would give it to the homeless. And lot of the homeless was the elderly. Our young ones can run; the older people couldn't. I had a ticket, too. When I went to court, there was thirteen of us, and was all the elderly except for one young girl who had a baby. So, we all had a ticket. And then, everybody was telling me, Just pay the twenty - five dollars, and you'll be let go. So, I said, Oh, okay, I'll listen. And when I went up there, the prosecuting attorney told me, How do you plead? I said, Not guilty. And she looked at me and she says, Well, I'll plea bargain with you. You pay just twenty - five dollars, you admit to trespassing on private property. I said, No, ma'am; I'm in a public park. And what the police officer got me for was for not camping in a designated campsite. I am in a campsite, Campsite 1. But you need to follow the park's rules. I said, What the police officer got me on was for not camping in a designated campsite. And when you stated you plea bargain with me, you just broke the law. So, we went back for trial, she asked for a continuance. The judge says, Denied. Looked at me and he says, Not guilty, with prejudice.

Meaning, the prosecutor couldn't bring it up again.

Yeah. See, I had done my research. I found out that under the State of Hawaii Constitution, Article 12, the Splinter Paddle Law, under the police badge holds the insignia of the splinter paddle. What is the splinter paddle? Men, women, and children may lie at the roadside without any harm.

What about people who just don't want to follow the rules; did you see people like that?

Oh, yeah.

They could have done life a different way, but they just chose to occupy the beach.

Yeah; we had all of those, all of those in our neighborhood. But, when you have people determined that the place is gonna look good, even the hardhead stubborn ones would either move out, or they will change. Because the men rose up to be our men. They really ensured that the place was properly kept. I guess we ended up having pride in the area we was living.

Alice Greenwood lived at Maili Beach Park for nine months before moving to an emergency shelter, and later transitional housing. Today, she rents space in a home where she and her son, now a teenager, have their own rooms. Being raised by a village has been a recurring theme in Alice Greenwood's life, whether it was as a child sent off to live with new aunts and uncles, or as a homeless mother who, along with her young son, was taken care of by people who often had even less than she did. In return, Alice Greenwood has given back to her community, from cleaning public restrooms to fighting for social and environmental justice. Mahalo to Alice Greenwood of the Waianae Coast for sharing her story of resilience with us. And mahalo to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, a hui hou.

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As you look back at your life, what are you most grateful for?

I think change, and being homeless.

Being homeless is one of the things you're grateful for?

Yeah. It taught me the compassion of life. When I was homeless when I was small, it was different. But when I'm homeless as an adult, I find out that was the best education I ever had in my whole life. It taught me about people. It taught me about the right and wrongs, and not to judge.