

GUEST: NICK VUJICIC
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When people talk with you for the first time, they're very nervous, and they don't know how to approach you.

Right.

How do you make it easier for them?

Well, you know, like, I sometimes even take advantage of that and become a little bit humorous sometimes.

For example?

Kids come up and say, What happened? And I say, Cigarettes.

[CHUCKLE]

And you know, then people around them start, you know, laughing. But I hug people. I was the Guinness Book of World Records holder for hugs in an hour; one thousand seven hundred and forty-one hugs in an hour. My arms fell off.

[CHUCKLE]

And someone beat me.

[CHUCKLE]

So now, we gotta go back and beat them back. But no; I love hugging. Hugging is my way of—obviously, they try to shake hands. I say, Don't worry, I don't shake hands, just give me a hug.

Nick Vujicic was born without arms or legs. Despite the many challenges this created for him growing up, he was able to overcome them all, and credits is

family's love, his faith in God, and his positive attitude for his success. Nick Vujicic, 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. Nick Vujicic is a motivational speaker as well as a best-selling author, a Christian Evangelist, and the leader of a nonprofit organization, Life Without Limbs. He's been an inspiration to audiences around the world, encouraging people to overcome obstacles and follow their dreams. But Nick was not always confident.

When you were born in Australia, did your parents know that you'd be born without limbs?

No; at the time, they even had ultrasounds, and no one bothered to check, to double check that I had my ten fingers and ten toes. And it was a shock; it was a tragedy. When I was laid by my mother's side, she said, Take him away, I can't look at him right now. Full of emotion and questions; Why, why did this happen, couldn't we see this at least coming?

Later, you would face all those questions. Why did this happen? But, what was their thought process in dealing with it?

It was obviously difficult. And I knew that it would be someday that I would be able to hear it straight from them. And I felt like I had to be a teenager before I really went down that way. For you to hear from your own mother, I couldn't hold you, I couldn't breast feed you, I couldn't have peace about your existence and your purpose for at least four months, that was hard to hear. And so, they took one day at a time, but my dad and mom were people of faith, believing that God does not make mistakes even though it's hard to see how He is perfect when imperfect things happen. But one day at a time, loving each other, and planting seeds of hope and encouragement; that's the only way that I got through my childhood. Going to school, getting bullied, they always were affectionate. They were very busy parents, but at the same time, they always made time to make sure that their son knew that he was beautiful, and that he's not a mistake, and to do this best.

When you were a little kid, you wore prosthetic arms.

Yes; at six years old, we had state of the art technology, 1989, actually made in Toronto, Canada. And they were very costly. Some people in Australia wanted to give me an opportunity, so they paid for it, and we were just so thankful for

that. And they were quite big. I was only a little guy; I was about twenty-five pounds at the time.

And they came with shoulders and arms.

Shoulders and whole harness thing, and the hand rotating, and the arms going up and down. But each arm weighed about six pounds, so it was quite heavy. And it stopped me from being so mobile. And then, I had to sort of relearn how to write. So, trying to write with my robotic arms means I had to move my whole body. That didn't work. I felt a bit like Robocop. And in me trying to accept myself, I had to accept myself the way that I was. So, there were some psychology as well in that. But overall, it wasn't a benefit for me.

Would you tell us about your early years?

Yeah, basically, I first up front say that I believe it's worse being in a broken home than having no arms and no legs. You can have arms and legs, but if your heart's broken, it's broken. If you're paralyzed by fear, you're disabled. And so, it was difficult for me to believe in a greater hope. A man without vision dies. I didn't see a good vision for my life, and I started dying on the inside.

Even though you had loving parents and a stable home?

Even though I had a loving stable home. Imagine; I know what would have happened if I didn't have that. 'Cause I actually was on the brink of giving up and trying to actually commit suicide.

When was that?

Age ten.

Age ten. What were you contemplating doing?

Drowning myself in my bathtub. I actually tried. I first thought of giving up at age eight. And I was thinking, Well, maybe I can just jump off the countertop of the kitchen counter as I watched my mom cook. That was our sort of bonding session. And I thought to myself, I'm done. You know, all the bullying at school, all the teasing. My mom and dad don't know if I'm ever gonna get married. I don't know if I'm gonna be ever independent. If I don't have a purpose, what's the point? If my pain's not gonna change, I want out. So, at age ten, as I tried to drown myself, I thought of one image. And the image was my mother and my father crying at my grave, wishing they could have done something more.

So, I decided to stay, just because of that. They didn't deserve that pain. So, I stayed.

I think you were one of the first crop of young people to be mainstreamed through schools, and there, you encountered bullying. What was the worst thing that happened to you in school?

You know, there is no pinnacle of my negative experience of bullying. And bullying is experienced by everyone, not just people in wheelchairs. So, the problem for me was the taunts, the stares, the laughs were not just in school, but in every public setting. You couldn't get away from it. You can't ignore it. But there is no one worst thing. But people, you know, called me names, they made different jokes, and some I tried to ignore, some I confronted. There was one guy, I did head butt him.

It was an actual arranged fight outside the buildings of school?

So, it was about this kid coming up to me and saying, I bet you can't fight. And you know me, now, you know, trying to be confident, I said, I bet you I can. He said, Well, how can you prove it? And I said, Well, I'll meet you on the field at lunch. There were about twenty of us there, and I never resort to violence since then. Fighting back is not the answer. If you need to self-defend yourself, if someone is really choking you and, you know, maybe you had some self-defense classes, but we're not here to attack. We're here to prove how strong we are. And I was tempted, and I took that fall. But I really didn't think he was gonna do it. I thought, How low can this guy be?

Exactly. Calling out a guy in a wheelchair. So, how did it work out? He did actually call you out of your wheelchair; right?

Right. You know, he said, You gotta get out of your wheelchair. And I'm like, Okay, so I can't run him over. [CHUCKLE] So, I go to I go to the field, and I said, Go on your knees. But he still had his hands. And you know, I wrestled with my brother and my sister, and I got a mean chin. I can, boom, get into their wrist, right to their bone, and you know, felt like I got that move. But I didn't think this guy was gonna—

But he had arms to ...

He was pretty tall, so therefore, long arms. Pushed me down once. And I'm like, Man, is this guy for real? Went up to him a second time, like walking up, and pushed me down again. And all the girls are like, Oh, leave him alone. And the

last thing I ever wanted was that. So, I got up and I charged, and I went straight into his nose. He flew back, blood came out.

So you hurled yourself at him.

Hurled myself at him. Used my wheelchair to get back up, and I jumped maybe three steps, four steps, but very fast. I used to be a lot faster when I was younger. And I said, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. And he just walked, and everybody was like, Wow, you know. So, imagine, first of all, my fear. I'm a PK, pacifist kid. I had to confess my sins to my parents. [CHUCKLE] I'm like, Mom and Dad, I'm so sorry, I have to tell you.

I beat up a guy at school today.

I head butted a guy at school, and blood came out of his nose. I'm so sorry. They didn't believe me. And they didn't smack me, they didn't discipline me. They used to discipline me that way with a belt. And I was ready for it. My parents did not spare the rod [CHUCKLE], and it was a way that they wanted to discipline us. That's how they grew up.

You got treated the same as your brother and sister?

Treated the same. I actually was probably the biggest bully out of all three of us. I'd dub my brother for things that I did actually, and so I was pretty bad. I was sort of getting bossy sometimes. So, that was the childhood Nick Vujicic, not realizing that my brother is just loving me and he's helped me as much as he can just because he can, and not because he's supposed to. And so, there were some dynamics there, but my parents, you know, they gave us good discipline. You know, if they felt that that was something to get us back on the straight and narrow, they did that. But I was very thankful that I did not get a smack. What do you mean you head butted a kid? And so, I didn't realize at the time that that they just thought I was wanting attention by them. So, I'm thankful that didn't happen. But I would never hit anyone, ever again. I promised myself. 'Cause the guilt that I had. And I realized that, you know, people gossiping about me or laughing at me, I realized it's either ignorance or hurting people or hurting others ignorantly. And even the people who were bullying me that one day where I had twelve bullies pick on me. And they didn't know that I was being picked on that much, and I felt like I should give up. And one thing that helped me to get through it, and even forgive them, was believing that someone out there actually did love me, outside of my family. And there was one girl who had no idea I was teased twelve times that day. I counted them all on my fingers. And she saw me across the playground on my way out of school, and she said, Hey, Nick! And I'm like, Great, here it is.

She came up, she looked me right in the eye; she said, Nick, I just want you to know that you're looking good today. And I'm like, Oh? So, that's why I became a speaker.

Even though he decided that he wanted to become a speaker, Nick Vujicic had no idea what he would talk about, or even where he would speak. He first had to survive the rest of his childhood.

Did you go through all of the angst of the questions that many people in difficult circumstances ask themselves? Why me? How could God do this to me? Why are people so cruel? How can I possibly survive? How can I provide for myself? How can I provide for a family? Can I have a family?

Right.

How did you go through all of that?

It was a journey. At thirteen years old, I actually hurt my foot playing soccer. So, I have a foot that's about six inches long with two toes that allows me to type and walk, and drive my wheelchair around, and swim.

And balance?

And balance. I was in bed for three weeks, sprained my foot. Three weeks being in bed for a thirteen-year-old is like three years. I felt disabled for the first time. I need my foot for everything, and I realized I need to be thankful for what I had, instead of being angry about what I don't have. So, I started counting my blessings. I said, God, more than arms and legs, I need purpose, I need peace, I want Heaven. Come into my heart, forgive me my sin; and Lord, if you don't give me arms and legs, I have a pair of shoes in my closet just in case He does. Use me. If I don't get that miracle, use me so that others would know that greater than a physical healing, you need a spiritual healing. You need your soul restored. He doesn't need to change my physical aspect; He needs to change my heart, my mind, and really give me what I'm looking for, happiness through peace.

So, you learned to have a positive attitude, but it took more than that, didn't it, to give you peace?

It did. It took time. It wasn't overnight. I have a positive attitude not because that's my coping mechanism, but I found real hope, real happiness. Not in temporary things of what people think of you or what job you're gonna get, or what money you're gonna have, and if or if you're not in a relationship. You

need to be, first of all, taking responsibility of your own happiness and your own peace within you. And as you see that reflection in the mirror, one day at a time, which is—it's hard for someone to feel like they're ugly and then look themselves in the mirror and say, I'm beautiful. But what I did, when I looked myself in the mirror, I said, Okay, Nick, you have no arms, no legs, but your eyes are beautiful; hold onto something. Nick, you can't do sports, but you're good at mathematics. Give yourself a chance. I had a plan to become an accountant and financial planner, and curve balls are thrown at us every day.

What was your curve ball?

A greater opportunity. That at the time, my parents thought I was crazy. They never thought I would be a speaker. They said, What are you gonna speak about? I said, I don't know. Are they gonna pay you? I don't know. Do you have any invitations? No. How are you gonna get them? I don't know. How are you gonna get there? I don't know. But when you find the truth that every day is an opportunity, you take one day at a time. Not just about what we can get and what we can have, but even the curve balls that come negatively at you. Remember the last obstacle you went through, how hard it was, how big it looked, how fearful you were. You still got through it. Maybe you don't even know how you got through it, but you're still here. If you're still here, there's an opportunity to grow. And if you're living tomorrow, you can do better than today. Whatever your goal is, find your real purpose, eternal purpose, and make sure that love is the thing that covers it all. One of my first big speeches, I was in front of three hundred teenagers, sophomore students for seven minutes, I had no idea what to do, my palms were sweaty. And within three minutes—did you get that? Palms sweaty. Yeah.

[CHUCKLE] Yes.

And within three minutes, half the girls were crying, and one girl in the middle of the room started weeping. She put up her hand, she said, I'm so sorry to interrupt; can I come up there and give you a hug? She came and she hugged me, she cried on my shoulder, and she said, Thank you, thank you, thank you; no one's ever told me that they loved me, no one's ever told me that I'm beautiful the way that I am. That's when I knew that hope was real as a way to uplift others, that even though I never got some miracles that I could still be a miracle for one other soul.

Nick Vujicic was nineteen when he gave the speech. Since then, he has traveled the world, meeting everyone from world leaders to the impoverished, sharing his story of hope with millions of people.

Teenagers see me up on stage. So, you know, eighteen schools in Hawaii over the two weeks that we had, you know, every time I get up there, they're like, Oh, is he gonna make me feel sorry for him, is it a depressing thing? And as I get up there and just break the ice, they're like, Wow, you know, this guy's pretty cool.

Yeah; lots of things on your mind as a public speaker as you approach a group.

Yes; definitely. Definitely. And I have still a lot to learn, but one thing you want everyone to be is at ease with whatever message, you know, you have. And the greatest message of all that you could ever, ever communicate is hope. So, that's what we try and impart.

Do you adlib, or do you have a prepared text?

I don't have a prepared text. After speaking two thousand six hundred times, meeting twelve presidents, and speaking at seven Congresses in total, you sort of have just this faith that, you know, I'm getting up there, and I know my story, I know the principles and values of my faith, and get up there and talk about Jesus in some settings. And in places where I cannot talk about my faith, we talk about never giving up, and dreaming big, and knowing that everyone's beautiful.

What are those places where you can't speak of your faith?

There's times in different regions of the world, for instance China. China is an open country for me to go there. And the cool thing about it is, if someone asks me about my faith, then I can definitely share about my faith. And so, in every speech that we've had with forty thousand students in university campuses, there was a time about five, six years ago where a lot of kids were giving up, jumping off buildings. And they asked me to go and speak at the university. It was just a pressure to perform, and the global economic crisis started getting everyone worried. Well, is there a job for me at the end of this? And suicide rates dropped immediately, eighty percent. And so, they put me on TV to forty million households. To the Arab world, we had a press conference in Egypt, 2008, with the governor of Alexandria and two hundred million Arabs were watching. And someone mentioned about their faith, and they sort of asked me to talk about mine. And so, we come in love, no matter what. And that's the greatest thing we want. You know, I work with Buddhists, I work with Muslims, I work with all people who want to make a difference in the world. So, I don't just work with Christians.

You hear many other people's really sad stories of affliction, of injury, of abuse, as you mentioned. And they're looking to you for answers. But sometimes, people can't hear your answer.

It's true. So many of us are deafened by the fear screaming at us, the echoes of everyone's taunts in our bed at night. I want them to know that they're, first of all, beautiful and they're here for a reason, and they're not a mistake. Just because you failed something a hundred times, or a hundred thousand times, you're not a failure. You gotta stand strong and finish strong. It's not about what happens to you; it's what you do with it.

You talk about do not fear, fight your fears. And one of the most common fears in the world is the fear of public speaking, which you have managed to do fearlessly.

[CHUCKLE] Well, you know, first of all, the greatest fear is public speaking; the second one is fear of death. So, some people would rather die before they speak; right? So, that's pretty funny. But I love speaking, and I'm not afraid of death, but I don't overcome all my fears. You can't ignore fear. F-E-A-R; false evidence appearing real. That's the irrational fear, the stupid thoughts that come into you, that never come true. Don't let that take over. Hold onto the rational fear, the things that you have to think through, the things you have to get through, but don't let fear disable you.

But when you go up there, if you sense the crowd may not be with you from the start, how do you get them on your side?

Well, first, don't use your fingers to fix your hair, 'cause that never works.

[CHUCKLE]

Now, look; for me, after speaking so many times, it was sort of after the five-hundredth speaking engagement that I had that you started to really learn to really even critique yourself while you're up there and read the crowd. I've now done two thousand six hundred speaking engagements in crowds as large as a hundred and ten thousand. And so, talk about, you know, knees shaking. So, I go up there sometimes still a little nervous sometimes, but I see that more as adrenalin. And I have people pray for me. But basically, be real. Your crowd knows exactly when you're not real. And if you're authentic and you have something good to say, and you have something that's applicable, simple, relevant, and it changes something, great, go for it, in a good way. So, hold onto those simple ways in how to live life. Because the most simple things that we can communicate are the most effective.

My guess is that you're good at reading people, because you've had a chance to observe them from your wheelchair, when you were a kid. And now, you've been exposed to lots of different types of people. Is that so? Can you read people well?

I think I can. Is that you kicking me under the table?

[CHUCKLE]

No, look; I'm thankful that I can look people in the eyes, and I'm just a channel. I'm not any greater human being than anyone on the planet. I'm not; we're all equal. And so, you know, I just want to try communicate love, and in that compassion that I have for everyone, 'cause I needed that love once myself. And knowing that I could be the hands and feet of love and hope, I always try to see if there's anything that I could say that might bring a smile to their face, or a comforting hug, or an encouraging word. And that's life. That's the cool part of life. You can be a light in a darkened place.

There was a time in your life when throngs of people were just loving your talks, and wanting to be with you and talk with you, but you still felt alone 'cause you didn't have a special relationship. How did that feel? What was that like?

If you're not happy single, you're not gonna be happy married. I did not need a wife. Did I still wanted to be married? Absolutely. And God knew the desire of my heart, but I had to come to a point in my relationship with Jesus to say, God, if You want me single for the rest of my life, I will still serve You, and I will still worship You. But if You do have that person out there for me, help me to know who that is.

Tell us about your romance.

We met at a small speaking engagement. Basically, as soon as my wife and I, we laid eyes on each other, it was like fireworks everywhere. And I felt and I saw that she saw them too.

Your wife looks like a local girl.

She does.

Because she's what we call a hapa Haole, I guess. Well, she's Mexican, Japanese.

Yes; Japxican.

[CHUCKLE] And you have a son. You don't discipline your own child in the way your parents disciplined you?

My kid's not disciplined yet; he's only one. [CHUCKLE] No, I don't think we would use a belt. But every now and then, I mean, it's gonna have to be my wife, 'cause I can't do anything. But we're gonna have to take it as it comes. No formula; that's what we're trying to do. We want the most with love and words.

I like what you did in one of your books. You talked about how to develop a positive attitude.

Yeah.

So, I'm gonna give you the negative, and then you tell me what you say is the positive way to look at it.

We got an exam here.

[CHUCKLE]

Now listen—

See if you remember what you wrote.

I wrote this three years ago on that one.

[CHUCKLE] Okay.

[CHUCKLE]

I'll never get over this.

One day I will, somehow, with someone.

I can't take this anymore.

You got through yesterday; just do better than yesterday, and you'll get through today.

This is the worst I've ever had it.

There's worse coming; but you're stronger from yesterday's trials. Take one day at a time; this too, shall pass.

I'll never find another job.

Yes, you will. And even if you don't, your value is not determined on how much money you bring to the table, and your love communicated to your sons and daughters are not how much you can prepare them for the greatest university. My son doesn't love me for what university he can go to; my son knows that I love him because I tell him every day. And he's too young to know that yet, but every day, I tell my wife she's beautiful, every day I'll tell my children they're beautiful and I love them too. That's how they know how much they love me, and how much I love them.

Nick Vujicic, who now lives in Los Angeles, travels around the world, inspiring others to believe that they too can overcome serious challenges. Mahalo to Nick Vujicic for sharing his stories of hope and faith with us. 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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How do you approach life daily? I believe you have a caregiver who travels with you.

Yeah; we have some caregivers who travel with me. As a teenager, I learned how to become independent. I could brush my teeth, comb my hair, shower myself.

Okay; how do you do that?

So, I have an electric toothbrush, and on a suction cup there is a cup that holds my electric toothbrush. I can turn it on with my shoulder. There's a standalone tube of toothpaste, and I push it down with my tooth, and then toothpaste comes out, and I go, r-r-r, move it around, and use my cheeks and lips to put some pressure on the brush while I move it all around. There was no training, no templates. It was really hard.

Oh, that's terrific.

But anything, whether we shampooed my hair or turn on the taps, or you know, even personal hygiene, it was all about trial and error. And so, that's the greatest principle of life. Sometimes, you have to learn through your own experiences. I wish I could learn from other people more. But that's how life is.