

GUESTS: STACY SPROAT-BECK

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One of the values and one the stories that I grew up with was, you know, if you think things are hard right now, you know, try losing everything that you've had twice in tsunamis. And coming back from that, there's a story of resilience, really, of being able to come back from losing everything. And also, they use that to teach us how, you know, it's material things that aren't what's important; it's your family and your relationships. And they're very uh, religious, you know, and it's God that's important. So, I feel like those are woven into the stories a lot.

Stacy Sproat-Beck was raised in a community on Kauai, where everybody knew each other. She grew up working alongside her extended family, fishing, farming, and raising cattle. This may not have been unusual in the early 1900s, but this was in the 1970s. Stacy Sproat-Beck, 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. Stacy Melela'i o kalani Sproat-Beck is the executive director of the Waipa Foundation, a Native Hawaiian cultural learning center on the north shore of Kauai. It's not far from Kalihiwai, a small village between Kilauea and Princeville, where Stacy was raised. During the 1970s, while much of Hawaii was undergoing a construction boom, life in Stacy's little community was still untouched.

My mom was from Kalihiwai, and my dad grew up here in Hauula. And his family is originally from Kohala, so he spent time there as well. But he grew up in Hauula, then he really fell in love with Kalihiwai, and I think he fell in love with my mom at the same time. And I was born here, and then we moved back to Kalihiwai three weeks after I was born.

To a family property?

Yeah. Actually, to the same street that I live on today. And we grew up in a house that they built right there, across the street from my grandparents, and up the hill from my uncle. And we're surrounded by family there, because it's where my mom's family came from.

And that is a place just beautiful beyond description. I mean Kalihiwai is just gorgeous. Mountain, stream, ocean.

It's pretty idyllic. It's beautiful.

LONG STORY SHORT WITH LESLIE WILCOX: (GUEST: STACY SPROAT-BECK)

Does everybody know each other?

Definitely back then. There were certain families that lived there, and everybody knew each other. And still, even today, many of the old families are still there where we live up in the hill. Because originally, all the families lived in the valley, and then after their homes got wiped out by the tsunami, my grandparents were able to facilitate purchase for them of properties up on the hill.

What tsunami was that? 'Cause there have been several that have hit; right?

Yeah; they got wiped out by both '46 and '57. And so, I think after losing everything they had twice—well, not everything, almost everything they had twice, they were able to get land up on the hill. And so, most of the old families live up there today.

Do they still have the land below as well?

M-hm. Yeah; we do. I know; that seems like somehow it was a good deal. [CHUCKLE]

What was daily life like for the family?

When I was little? [CHUCKLE]

M-hm. You know, when you were growing up in the 70s. And you know, you grew up in the 70s, and that was the second decade of Hawaii as a state. Your background seems like it came from an earlier era, but you know, this was the 70s. You stayed pretty much in the same small area where you lived.

Yeah. And I tend to think that maybe the rural communities in Hawaii were like that, in that they modernized, they became modern more slowly. You know, it just took longer for things to reach us, and it probably still does. But we definitely grew up in an older style, and maybe it's because our family was still sort of practicing fishing, and living off the land, and farming, that our other values were like that, in that you didn't just go down to Hanalei, because that was somebody else's fishing place. You know, you didn't go down to Haena, because there were other families that that was their place. And you know, if you have business there, then you go there. I mean, Haena is only fifteen miles away today, and we go down there to go to the beach all the time. But back when I was a kid, the only time we would go to Haena was for the Mahuikis' Christmas party.

When you were invited.

Right; when we were invited to go to their Christmas party. Or unless, we were, you know, rounding up cattle or something. We had cattle together. So, it was only when there was really a specific thing to go for, when we'd go out to these places. And we wouldn't just go surf in Hanalei. I mean, I think, you know, I boogie boarded when was

starting in middle school, and Kalihiwai was the only place that I ever rode waves until after I graduated from high school. My uncle said, Eh, let's go to Hanalei. And I thought, Wow, we're went to Hanalei. And that was the first time I'd ever actually been there and been surfing somewhere outside of little Kalihiwai. So, I think it was just really growing up in a rural community with a family that had old style values, you know.

And there may be another reason you didn't venture too far away. You had so much to take care of, even as kids.

[CHUCKLE] Yeah. Yeah; we worked on the farm, and we fished, and it was all really fun.

It wasn't fishing for fun, necessarily. It was subsistence fishing.

Yeah; subsistence and commercial. You know, the akule would come in, in the summertime, huge schools of akule. And actually, just yesterday, my dad and some of the other folks from Kalihiwai, they surrounded a school of akule. So, they still come in, not as much as before. But before, there would just be huge schools of fish that would come in, in the summertime, and that was a really busy time for our family, because that was the hukilau season. And so, everybody was on alert when the fish was in.

You did this by boat; right?

Yeah.

Hukilau nets by boat?

Yeah. It was all rowing the boat out to surround the fish, you know, and then netting the fish, and dragging them in to shore. And then, from shore, there would be like big scoop nets sort of that we would scoop the fish out, put 'em in big ice boxes, and then everybody would go home with a mahele, a share, all the community folks that helped. And there was fish for everybody. And we would ship a lot of the fish here to Honolulu, to sell.

And that was just a part of tradition that had been happening for a long time?

Yeah; multiple generations in our family were marine resource managers. My great-grandfather, who I didn't really know, 'cause he passed away maybe when I was one, or something, he was the konohiki of these fisheries in these particular areas around where I grew up. And then, it passed down to my grandfather, who was his oldest son.

In the 1970s, there was a konohiki?

Well, the konohikis actually officially ended in the 50s. But people still respected our family as the resource managers. Our family was still doing most of the fishing and the resource management in these areas through the 70s, really. And it was only in the

1980s—I mean, I remember it distinctly, when other families started fishing and going out and catching the fish, and it was really a difficult thing for us, I think, for our family. And like, with my grandpa being the konohiki, and I feel like when people realized it and started catching all the hee where they used to sort of regulate the hee catch on the reef, he really saw the populations decline. And I feel like in his later years, he was really sad because of that. Because where once there was abundance on the reef, they wouldn't catch hee, you know, smaller than two pounds, now there's nothing.

Fishing was not Stacy Sproat-Beck's family's only means of support. Her parents held regular jobs, and the family had other businesses as well that were closely tied to the land.

You were also involved in all kinds of other natural businesses.

Yes. I feel like my family's been in resource management for years. Even though we fished a lot when I was a kid, we eventually moved into farming. And it seems like more of my memories through the 80s, the late 70s and 80s were actually working on the farm. We farmed papayas and cucumbers, and flowers, and all kinds of things. Now, I'm not really a fisherman nowadays. My brother-in-law is a fisherman, my dad still fishes, but I'm a farmer. And I think maybe those were more of the influential years for me, was farming.

You mentioned you were chasing down cattle with horses.

[CHUCKLE] Well, when I was in school, and probably through high school, maybe a little in college, like I was saying, our family did just so many things, you know, and just a lot of exciting things. We had a cattle ranch, we had about fifty head of cattle, we farmed, we had a papaya farm, and we fished, and we had pigs, and we had prawns.

And your parents both had fulltime jobs.

They did.

A fireman and teacher.

Yeah.

And they did all this too, your parents?

Well, we lived with our extended family too; right? So there were my grandparents that were there. And my grandpa was really active working on the farm until his later years. And then, my uncle, my mom's brother lived there with us, and his wife. And so, it was like a family business, basically, or family businesses. But we were all pretty busy, and there was always something to do, you know.

Nobody really directed you all the time; you were always looking for what was off kilter or what needed to be done.

Well, they were always telling us, you know, yeah, see what needs to be done, and do it, and dragging us off to do different things, like feeding the cows or fixing fence. My sister and I have memories of being dragged off into the bushes in the middle of the night to fix fence, because the cops had called and there were cows on the road. And so, somebody had to go and put the cows back in, and fix the fence. And my dad would take us up there, because he had three daughters and he didn't have sons. So, we would get dragged off to do that. Or sometimes, my dad was at work, and so, it was my mom and us and my grandpa that would have to go up there. And he'd take us up there sometimes, and you know, there would be a hole in the fence in the middle of the jungle, and take us and drop us off, and say, Wait here. And it's dark, in the middle of the night. Stay here, and I'm gonna go over there and look for the cows, and I'll come back. But, you know, if cows come, don't let come through the fence. [CHUCKLE] And we're little kids standing there, like ... I'm in the bushes by myself at night. You know. And it wasn't so much worrying about other people that might find you; it's just thinking about, you know, the cows coming and you trying to stop them, or other things that might be, you know, out there in the night that you can't see.

Did it make you braver, do you think, about other things?

[SIGH] I think it made us paranoid for a while. I think. We were always like, thinking about—

Don't come for me in the middle of the night.

--ghosts or something that might be out there. I don't know. But now; I think it was good. And I think, now that I'm raising my own kids, you know, thinking about all of these lessons that we've been taught along the way, and trying to transmit them to the kids nowadays, and just really the grit of being told no, I'm gonna put there in the bushes, and it's dark, yes it is, it's the middle of the night, but you stay there and you watch for cows. And then, going off. I can't imagine my kids doing that today.

It sounds like you didn't need any toys; you always had something interesting to do.

Yeah; yeah. I think that's what it was, really, was being outside and finding things to entertain yourself. I know that we always were making forts outside. We did a lot of fort making when I was a kid, both at the beach, and outside our house. My cousins would come up in the summertime from Honolulu, and we'd all be on the beach all day, and making forts in the bushes. And you know, there were streams running down; we'd always be making our little landscapes with the ponds and the rivers that were coming out, and damming them up to play different things.

So, no Legos, no staying inside with technology.

No. [CHUCKLE]

Stacy Sproat-Beck's country lifestyle came to an abrupt halt when she turned twelve. Following family tradition, she was sent to Oahu to attend Kamehameha Schools Kapalama.

My family is a legacy at Kamehameha, and so, I was told that that was what was gonna happen, and that was really the best option for me. And so, it was something that I actually accepted early on.

And you boarded there?

Yeah. It was pretty hard, definitely, because I came from such a close family, you know. And being in the dorm with all the kids, it was really different, and it was really difficult being separated from family. And I think, you know, in seventh grade, it's about a year of homesickness, you know, and then you kind of eventually get over it. But it was never really an option with my family to quit and to come home. It was just never an option.

You stayed there and you watched for the cattle; right? [CHUCKLE]

Yeah. You stay there, and you get good grades. [CHUCKLE]

So, basically, it was always about what had to be done, and you stayed and you did it.

Yeah; yeah. And there was always that expectation. And I feel like that came from all of my family, especially my maternal grandmother. She was Chinese-Hawaiian, but she seemed like more on the Chinese side, my Chinese grandmother, and she was just very driven, and a driven person that knew what needed to be done and was always there.

She wanted you to succeed.

Yeah. Yeah. And I feel like she's definitely one of the people that pushed us. And when it came down to whether there were options or not, it was like, No, you're gonna do this.

And you listened.

Yeah. Yup.

You went to USC, a very fine business school. I mean, there are a lot of wealthy scions, you know, sons and daughters of magnates.

It was kind of a culture shock. You know, not so much being in a city that size, or in a school that size, because you know, I'd lived here for six years in Honolulu and gone to Kamehameha, and this is a big city too. But definitely, USC was kind of a culture shock

for me. And I didn't fit in that well. And sort of one of the things I think of those years is, I actually didn't have any friends. [CHUCKLE]

Did you not? Really?

Through most of my college years, I didn't have friends, until I went on a study abroad program halfway through, and I made some really good friends on this trip to France. And I came back with a couple of really good friends for the last couple of years.

But before that, you just gritted your way through classes without friendship and companionship?

Yeah. And you know, now that I think about it, it didn't bother me that much. And later on, I realized that it was actually a really good thing, because I ended up graduating with straight A's. I graduated like, magna cum laude, which you know, by the time I graduated, I was like, Really? Wow, how'd I do that? [CHUCKLE] And it was 'cause I didn't have any friends. So, it actually worked out perfectly. But now, I do have a couple of really dear friends that are back in L.A. that come to visit now and then.

Did you know what kind of business you were going to do, or were you thinking of extrapolating it to Kalihwai?

I definitely was thinking about family business the whole time. Yeah. And when I was in business school, I'd ask my instructors—because it was a big business school, and it was always about big business, and you know, how you were gonna make the most money possible. And you know, I'd raise my hand go, Well, what about family business? And they'd go, Oh, no, no, no; don't talk about that. You know, family business is really hard. And I'd go, Oh, what about nonprofits? And they'd go, Nonprofits? You know, maybe we'll bring somebody in to talk about nonprofits, but nonprofits aren't really where the money is. And so, it was kind of a different thing for me. But I still feel like I gained a lot of knowledge and important skills from going there, definitely. It was an amazing education.

What did you do after USC business school?

So, I actually at the time, for some reason, even though, like I said, I always knew I wanted to come home to Kalihwai, it was just this deep longing in me wanting to come home, I wasn't really decided when I was approaching graduation at USC. I didn't have a plan of what I was gonna do. And you know, one of the things you do when you're a senior is, you just interview with firms. And so, I was interviewing with firms up there, and nothing was really sounding that interesting, and I was kind of not exactly sure what I was gonna do. And then, just a few weeks before my graduation were the Rodney King riots. And every shopping center around school got burned down, and you know, L.A. was in a shambles. And it was crazy. And that was definitely one of the things that made me go, I'm outta here, I'm going home. It's too crazy up here.

When you came home, I think you were aware of what was going on, but weren't there for a lot of the fireworks. There was a lot of militance about the way land was going on the North Shore, the push for resort development, and the move away from a rural lifestyle.

On Kauai?

M-hm.

Yeah. It seems like that was happening throughout our childhood and youth. I forget what year it was that Kilauea Sugar went out, but that's when sort of the sugar company transitioned out, and then there was development that was coming in, in the 70s and 80s, and the desire to develop all those former sugar lands, and then all along Hanalei and Princeville there. And my parents were really active, and my family was really active in fighting development and wanting to manage it, really, and not just let it get out of hand.

And in fact, they were fighting Kamehameha Schools, where you'd attended, owner of Waipa.

Yeah; in the early 80s. Yes, Kamehameha became one of the entities that wanted to develop their landholdings there on the North Shore. They were in development mode, and so, their plans for Waipa and Lumahai were golf courses, resort communities. Back then, it was all about developing the land so they could make money to support the school at Kapalama and the estate. And you know, families from the community, led by Auntie LaFrance Kapaka-Arboleda, who was an activist that came in and really sort of catalyzed community members, especially Hawaiian families in the community, and especially alumni families in the community, they got together and fought Kamehameha on their desire to develop. And eventually, after four years of activism and negotiation, and the default of the developer, the potential developer, they were able to obtain a lease from Kamehameha for the sixteen-hundred-acre ahupuaa of Waipa, which is an intact watershed. It's amazing. I moved home in '92, and I really started helping at Waipa in '94. And it was really just difficult. There were a lot of different challenges and issues, there were different ideas of management, of administration. They were having to fundraise. They were a for-profit at the time, because Kamehameha refused to lease to a nonprofit, because what they really wanted was money, and they didn't want to lease to a bunch of activists. So, it was a for-profit, so they weren't getting as much grant support as they could have. But they didn't say we couldn't have a nonprofit, so we started a nonprofit. We started the Waipa Foundation, and we kind of just ran the two entities side-by-side.

And you were doing this as a volunteer?

Yeah; yeah. I was kinda like living my parents' life, maybe. [CHUCKLE] Well, farming with my husband on the side, helping manage Waipa on a volunteer basis, and then

also, I think I was doing promotions for a boat company to actually make money to pay my bills. When Kamehameha went to strategic planning in 2000, 2001, they changed their whole viewpoint on land management and revenue-generating lands versus lands for culture and education, and also kind of right around that same time, all of these other difficulties that we had just sort of went away. Things have really just grown like crazy since then, and gone in an amazing direction. I feel like the lessons learned from those really hard times are kind of what maybe grounds me and the organization in sort of humility and remembering that things don't always come easy.

What do you do on the sixteen-hundred-acre property?

My dad guys envisioned it, the original founders, it was to be a land base for the practice and perpetuation of Hawaiian culture. And so, that was their vision. And so, we continue to perpetuate that today by doing programs for kids that connect them with the land, and also, you know, we do enrichment programs and leadership, and cultural programs, and they're in the garden and harvesting, and also just swimming in the streams, and maybe doing a lot of the things that I did as a kid, that we all did. I feel like what that does today is, it connects us back to the earth when a lot of us are just busy living somewhat urban lives, that it's helping them to make the connection. So, we do programs for kids. We do resource management. You know, we manage learning sites and sites that we're restoring. We have a fishpond that we're restoring along the coast, and then we've got loi, taro fields and gardens, and a native plants nursery. And then, up in the valley, we're doing reforestation. And then, sort of teaching and learning through all of that. We do so many things; festivals and gatherings, and farmers' markets, and we make poi and feed the community. I think being out there, too, and just having the opportunity to hike, and observe, yeah, and explore. And even another thing that's really amazing to us is that we've planted a lot of fruit trees lately, orchards of fruit trees, everything from, you know, longan and lychee to mango, and oranges, and avocado, and ulu, star fruit. And really, to be able to created abundance, lots of food, because we know the importance of having lots of food there, both to feed ourselves and you know, to share with community, and then to market, too. But also being able to take the kids out. Oh, and mountain apples too; that's a big one. Being able to take the kids out and let them pick their own snacks off the trees. I mean, we grew up with that, but kids nowadays—

They look for a box. [CHUCKLE]

It blows their mind when they go out, you know, and are able to pick mountain apples and eat them. It's just the most amazing experience for them. And for us, I think that should be so basic, you know.

And all along, you were thinking of running a family business at Kalihiwai, not run a nonprofit out of Waipa, nine miles down the road.

Yeah; I kind of had an inkling I might end up doing that. Because I remember asking that question when I was in college. You know, what about a nonprofit? Because I

knew it was there, and it was really an amazing opportunity, you know, to be able to grow this entity that is really for the community, and to take care of the land, and to teach people.

What's the goal for Waipa Foundation now in the ahupuaa?

Well, our sort of vision is a thriving and abundant ahupuaa, and a healthy community that's connected to their resources. And so, it's both. Yeah, exactly that. Just thriving and abundant with land and resources being healthy, and feeding us in many ways, both physically, spiritually, and then also community that is connected to the place, that helps to take care of it, and is nourished by it, and also actively manages and takes care of the land. And I think that's our vision, specifically for Waipa, but also, it's a larger vision. You know, Waipa could be just a microcosm of the state or the island, or the world, where everybody is directly connected to the resources that feed them and take care of them. And they manage and take care of the land, and it takes care of you.

Stacy Sproat-Beck of Kalihiwai, Kauai grew up learning from her family and working hard. She continues to live the lifestyle that she was raised in, close to the land, and is doing what she can at Waipa to set an example for the rest of the world to follow. Mahalo to Stacy Sproat-Beck for sharing her stories 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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Your children are eight and twelve now. And twelve is when you went away to Kamehameha on Oahu.

Yes.

And you mentioned a legacy, the legacy of the school in your family. What's the plan for the kids?

Oh, the plan, the big question. [CHUCKLE] You know, I look back on the way Kamehameha was presented to me when I was young, and it was never a choice. And I'm glad that that was my path. And today, it's so hard to force them into things that are not their choice; right? And we always want what's best for our kids. We're not pushing them into it, but if they want to, then we'll definitely do our best to make that our option.