

GUEST: DANIEL CASE

LSS 817 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 4/14/15

There was something from your high school years about your being elected a class officer. But I think it said that your nickname was—

Mouse.

--Mouse, because you kinda kept quiet, and when you answered questions, you left a lot out. You just weren't real talkative.

Well, I was shy. Shy, and I was very young, younger than most of the people in my class. I was no Tyrone Power, so, somebody called me Mouse. And in those days, you'd be surprised how many boys particularly had nicknames, and they couldn't shake 'em until they left.

Did you not like your nickname?

I hated it.

Oh. Because it sounded mousey; right?

It was kind of wimpy-ish, and ... there was some truth in it. [CHUCKLE]

That shy boy who lacked confidence in school grew up to be a strong legal advocate in a prominent law firm, and a family whose children include billionaire Steve Case. Daniel Case, 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. Daniel Case turned ninety in 2015 after working into his late eighties. He spent sixty years at the same prominent Honolulu law firm, retiring in 2013. He's known for having both influence and humility. And he's a devoted family man who sometimes gets choked up with emotion when he speaks of his wife Carol or his children. In the year 2000, his number-three kid, internet billionaire Steve Case, bought the former neighbor island sugar plantation where his father grew up. Daniel Case's childhood had

the trappings of privilege without the cash, but he says his life was rich in outdoor adventures.

I grew up on "cow I". And that's the way we all pronounced it, even the Hawaiians. [CHUCKLES]

I can always tell somebody who grew up on Kauai. I say that, 'cause I'm from Honolulu, and I didn't grow up there at that time. And it's sort of capital C-O-W ... I.

Yeah.

"Cow I". [CHUCKLE]

I agree. No; it's uh, it's accepted now. But say it, I say "cow I". [CHUCKLE]

What was it like? You grew up on Grove Farm Sugar Plantation.

I did. It was ... very rural. My father got his first job out of the Army at Grove Farm as a luna, as they all start at the bottom. And then, G.N. Wilcox needed a bookkeeper, and apparently had the talent, so he made him his bookkeeper. And then, he became the office manager, and all that stuff. But they built a plantation home, no architect, just Japanese carpenter. They were very good. And they built a house for he and my mother. But it was a nice house. It had four bedrooms in it, a normal house, and plenty of room, and a nice big yard, and everything. So, it was very pleasant.

When you say your dad started out as a luna, what did he do? What kind of luna work?

Those days, when they had a sugar plantation, you had crews of workers. Hard work. And many of them, as you know from history, Hawaiians began it, but they really didn't like the work, and they brought in Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and then Puerto Rico and different places. But they started because of the hot sun. They all congregated at about four-thirty in the morning, and the lunas, the people that were in charge of different areas would meet and agree on which fields needed work today, whether it's irrigation or harvesting, or clearing the fields, or whatever it was. And then, after he quit being a luna, then he'd go to the office. But otherwise, he'd then go back and supervise whatever area his group was.

So, he made this transition to indoor work, and on up the chain.

Right; right. So, he just turned out to be good at it, and so, he did it all his business life. He'd always been very good with numbers and investments.

What did you do with yourself as a boy growing up in the country on Kauai?

Well, I had a good life. We lived next door to the manager's house. And it was a wonderful eight-acre estate, really. 'Cause it was built by G.N. Wilcox for his son-in-law, Digby Sloggett, who married a Wilcox. So, they had a tennis court closer to our house than his, a wonderful swimming pool where we all learned to swim, a great front yard, royal palm drive-in and a port cochere.

What kind of trouble did you get up to?

Actually, we never had any trouble. We honestly didn't. We were busy all the time. Nobody had play dates then. The kids from Lihue School, it's only about a mile home. So, we'd would walk back. And then, those that were able to come, would come and join us for tennis, and swimming, and touch football, and all that stuff. So, we always had something to do.

Mostly sports? Not exploring and playing with sticks, and ...

Well, we took a lot of hikes. Partly, we could just go without a car. Across the street, there was a valley, up from the mill to the Grove Farm museum. We would hike that. We could walk to Lihue town, and we with a little help from somebody who had a car, we would go to Kipu Falls, which was down to Lihue valley as we call it. If we were really lucky, they'd take us to Poipu and go to Brennecke's to bodysurf.

What was your expectation of yourself, as you were growing up? What did you think you would become?

Nothing; I didn't have the faintest. In my own mind, I said, you go down the middle of the road. [CHUCKLE]

So, you didn't have these, you know, striking career goals, where you had to do this, that, and that by a certain time; not at all?

Never. Somewhere along the line, because my father was never—they never paid much. There got a lot of perquisites; a free house, a yardman, n=and medical privileges, but they didn't pay them much. I always wanted to make a million bucks. [CHUCKLE] That was my only goal.

Really? And yet, you were perceived as a child of privilege. Well, you did have a lot of entitlements.

We did.

But you're saying your family didn't have a lot of money.

Yeah. Yeah; money in the bank. My father had to borrow money to send me to Punahou.

When Daniel Case was in the eighth grade, his parents sent him to boarding school on Oahu, back when Punahou still had student boarders on campus. Young Case's senior year of high school was disrupted by the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

What was it like living in the dorm when you were in eighth grade, through almost your senior year?

Well, it's wonderful. Roughly, thirty-three seems to be a magic number, but it could have been a little more. Well, we had thirty-three friends in different grades. They had some in from seventh grade, that was a little young. So, we got to know a lot of people from the grades, about five grades in a row, and six sometimes. And so, that was helpful, getting to know people around the campus, and knowing the school people, and following the activities, mainly the sports. You know, we were right above Alexander Field, where we used to play football all the time, and then they built a beautiful track. The swimming pool was right below it. So, we followed all those sports every day. [CHUCKLE] And participated in many of them, and so it was just a very good life, one of the happiest times in my life right there.

And yet, you didn't have your parents, you weren't in your parents' home. Did you miss them? Did you miss Mom?

Well, [CHUCKLE] in truth, we were just happy the way we were. Happy to go home, but happy to be there.

You were at a critical age during Pearl Harbor.

M-hm.

You were on campus when the Pearl Harbor attack came.

Yes, I was. Yeah; we had finished breakfast, and there was a building called Dole Hall then, where both the boys and the girls always ate together. And they mixed the tables, so we would socialize a little bit, and we'd talk after the meals. And we'd gone back, and we'd seen some anti-aircraft, it turned out to be. We didn't know that. But then we heard on the radio that there'd been an invasion, so we all went down to the girls' dorm. They had better radio facilities there, and we listened to Roosevelt's speech. Then, as I say, the next day, really, but effectively Monday morning, the engineers took over the campus. So, we finished school going to Central Union Church just briefly, figuring out what to do. But we all dug trenches, we had gas masks, and all that stuff.

You wore gas masks as a general rule during the day; right?

That started fairly soon; yeah.

And did you ever do any guarding of the campus? I know at Kamehameha Schools, that was done.

Well, that very first two nights, we did. They had compulsory ROTC then. And so, the very first night, Sunday night, those of that lived in the dorm that were in ROTC, of which there were five or six, were sent up to Rocky Hill, which is the hill above the campus, but had the water tank for that whole school. And they spread us around Rocky Hill to protect the stuff. My particular one was protecting the water tank. And we all loaded rifles, but we really didn't know how to shoot 'em. [CHUCKLE] It was a very dark night. The Japanese had planned it very, very well. So, we were just all kinda itchy. [CHUCKLE] But luckily, none of us shot each other. [CHUCKLE]

After graduating from Punahou in 1942, Daniel Case headed off to Williams College in Massachusetts. He joined the Navy in 1945, serving for four years, before going to law school at the University of Denver. While he was waiting to take the Bar, a fluke accident brought Case back to Hawaii to recuperate. Here, he would stay for a six-decade legal career.

I think I've read that you and your friends were ... you may have, on your own, bought or somehow you ran a hotel while you were going to law school?

Yeah. Well, when I first got back, and my friend—Al Herman, his name was, very good friend. We got out in April, and Williams didn't start until late September. So, he was gonna get married, and so he worked for his father, which was a downtown hotel. Hundred rooms, but third-rate in every sense of the meaning. [CHUCKLE] And so, I was with him and looking around, and there was a restaurant across the street called the Owl Café, selling for three thousand

dollars. Happened to be three thousand I got getting out of the Navy, severance pay. And foolishly, I bought it. And I ran it. I had no experience, just stupidity. But I did run it, and then with that and the G.I. Bill, I was able to get through my last year of college.

So, you made a profit?

I profited from a place to live and self-sufficiency. But I sold it, after we got into law school for the same three thousand bucks. So, I made about five cents an hour. [CHUCKLE] And then, his father trusted me, liked me, offered my friend and I, the lease of the hotel free, without any down payment, and we just took it over and ran it while we went through law school. So, that experience was helpful.

So now, you've graduated from law school. What was your area of expertise in law school? Had you picked it?

No; no. You really didn't pick specialties. Those were days of generalism. In school, you could take different courses, but we all basically took the same courses. And back then, most of the law firms wanted the associates to be fairly general in the beginning, and learn how to do different specialties. And then, after, oh, a year or two, or three, if they showed an interest and skill in a particular area, then they would go in that area. So, I didn't have any; I just went to work. [CHUCKLE]

And you weren't hoping you'd be chosen for this particular type of law?

No; just wanted to practice.

I imagine a lot of people didn't come home from law school; they stayed on the mainland and worked. Was it always your plan to come home?

Not really. I left Hawaii when was seventeen, and except for a stint in the Navy, I really hadn't been back 'til I was twenty-seven. I was away ten years, so I didn't know if I had any old friends or anything. So, it didn't have a must draw to it. And in fact, in law school, a couple of us were good friends; we planned to sort of start a law firm of our own. Nothing serious, four of us, that's what we'd do after we take the Bar exam and decide. So, we didn't do any more than talk about it. But then, we had to take the Bar. And strangely, this is fate. My best friend and I said, Let's work in an ice plant and toughen up a little. And we'd been working, and a hundred-pound cake of ice broke my foot. [CHUCKLE]

[CHUCKLE] Oh!

So, I was in a cast for a short spell, and I started saying, Maybe I'd better just go home. So, I came home.

Home, being?

Hawaii.

To Oahu, or Kauai?

My father was still on Kauai. But I never expected to practice anywhere else. So, I looked for a job when I first got here, one particular law firm, Pratt, Tavares & Cassidy, and the Attorney General and the City. None of them offered me a job right away, so I then studied for the Bar. Went home, stayed with my father. My parents had been divorced in 1948; he'd been remarried to a very nice lady, and so I got to know them that way. And studied for the bar, and ... came back tried again. And Pratt, Tavares & Cassidy offered me a job, so that's where I stayed for sixty years.

And in all that time, you didn't leave that firm.

I was happy. They treated me well, I was happy, I liked being a lawyer, and I liked the clientele we had. Many of the clients, a young lawyer starts to get to know them, and then the older lawyer retires or dies, and there's a tendency to stay with the client. So, you build relationships, and I was fortunate enough to do that.

Daniel Case recalls a land sale on Maui as part of settling the estate of the late-famed aviator Charles Lindbergh. The fight over Lindbergh's estate made headlines when an attorney who said he represented Lindbergh's abducted child tried to claim the Lindbergh land on Maui.

And we filed a notice in the Maui court, and a lawyer from Georgia, never heard of him before or since, filed a claim saying he represented the former Lindbergh child, that he was alive. And so, we had a lot of litigation over it, but his main purpose, we decided, was to get publicity by interviewing Anne Lindbergh and the kids, and all that. So, they didn't want that.

It was really the lawyer who wanted the publicity.

Yes.

Not the pretender to the Lindbergh baby identity.

Not the pretender. We don't know if he exists. So luckily, we were able to get it dismissed by the judge. And so, it was gone, and he didn't pursue it further. That was interesting.

When I read the names of the people in your law firm that you joined—you said that wasn't a shoe-in, you had to look for a job. But that was a kick-butt law firm. I mean, those were the Territorial days, and I remember those names as being big cheeses in Hawaii at the time.

Well, they were. Dudley Pratt was a marvelous person, good citizen, very good lawyer, very good in the community, and a wonderful mentor. Judge Tavares was a very bright guy who was the State Attorney General, from which Dudley Pratt hired him. And Judge Cassidy was a well-known prosecutor.

So, when you became an attorney, did you have to go toe-to-toe and head-to-head, and to the jugular with people?

Well, luckily, I wasn't born to be a litigator. But when I got back from law school, I knew I was shy and not a very good public speaker. So, I went to the Dale Carnegie School after work once a week for five months, which helped a little bit. And then, after I finished it, they asked me to be a teacher. That was manuahi, but I did that for another four months, just for the exposure and trying to get used to it. And I think it helped me. I was never a battering ram litigator, but I did it for a couple of years, did the best I could. And I wasn't strong at it.

Daniel Case met the love of his life at a friend's wedding. Carol was a teacher at his alma mater, Punahou. The two got married and raised four children together. At first, the Cases didn't expect to have a big family.

Our oldest daughter, Carin, was adopted. Because the doctor told Carol she didn't look like she could have children. So, Frank Spencer, her doctor, wahine doctor, said there was a nice child coming up, and that we might consider it. So, we did. So happens that Carol was pregnant. [CHUCKLE] We didn't know it 'til after we'd made the decision. So we stuck with it, and happily so. Then we had a son Danny five months later. And then, thirteen months later, our son Steve.

That was a busy household.

[CHUCKLE]

Oh, boy.

And a little over four years later, our son Jeff. So, she had a lot of work and needed a lot of help.

Daniel Case's third child is America Online cofounder, billionaire Steve Case. In the year 2000, Steve Case bought the former Kauai Sugar Plantation where his father grew up. Grove Farm had evolved into a land management company and commercial developer, and it ran into financial trouble. It needed to be saved. For the company and its obligations, Steve Case reportedly paid some one hundred million dollars.

Pretty cool to have a son who's a white knight.

Well, he started what he did, and made a lot of money. [CHUCKLE]

Did you see that in him as he was growing up?

Oh, I don't think you could ever see it in him. He was always independent and busy. He never had enough time, which was a clue to something, but I don't know what. I don't think he knew, either. But he was always that way, all his life. Today, he's very restless and wants to do things.

And he is a disrupter. He does things—

Yeah.

Did you see that as a kid? I say that in a positive sense.

No; not in the slightest.

Not; okay. Because basically, you have to go against the grain sometimes, to really make headway.

Well, it's true. When they were first starting AOL—that wasn't its name at the time. But the predecessor just wasn't making it, making any money, so he worked with him, though, and then finally, the guy turned it over to Steve and two other executives and said, You take it over. So, they took it over, and worked on it. And Jim Kimsey was more experienced and a little older, and he became the CEO, and Steve was just number two or three. I don't know what you would call it. But he then helped push it along very well. He was a good marketer, and has a good thinking mind.

Daniel Case's most difficult moment came in 2002, as his firstborn son, named after him, lost his life to brain cancer.

He was one wonderful guy. [SNIFFING] Very successful, very popular. He was a Rhodes Scholar, and wonderful investment banker. And helped a lot of people.

Would you agree that the hardest thing for a parent to go through is the death of a child? Any advice you could give other parents who go through something like that?

Just ... just work with them with their time off. When they found it, he was already Stage 4. So ... it was terminal. So ... surgery in the beginning, and got treatment. He lived another sixteen months. We spent a lot of time.

Daniel Case considers his family to be his greatest joy and achievement. At the time of our conversation in February of 2015, Case was about to head out to a retreat on Oahu's north shore with his loved ones and celebrate his ninetieth birthday.

Do you have a history in your family of longevity?

[CHUCKLE] I think my sister-in-law, Celia Case, was wonderful, looking in the genealogy and stuff; a scrapbook. And I think I would have been the oldest in my family, except my older brother Jim is still alive, [CHUCKLE] and doing pretty well at ninety-four, going on ninety-five. So, I think he holds the family record. [CHUCKLE]

Because you seem like you're trim and fit, and you know, ageless.

No; it's not true. We've all got a lot of nicks and crannies, and problems. But I'm fortunate to be as healthy as I am.

I mean, you're driving around, you're going daily to—you play a regular Bridge game at the Pacific Club. What else do you do?

Well, since I retired, I read a lot. I always have. And a lot of television, including your program, and public television generally. And we have friends. So, it's a quieter life, clearly.

What do you read?

Almost everything. I love history, I like novels, I like business stuff. I try and mix reading business type books with a novel or a history book, and mix it up. But I like long books. [CHUCKLE]

[CHUCKLE] Oh, big, fat books.

I do. I like many of those. So, I just mix it up, and it keeps me going.

Also in 2015, Daniel Case and his wife Carol celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary. His secret to a long and happy marriage? Give extra love, Case says, and always respect each other. We'd like to thank Kauai born Daniel Case of Honolulu for sharing his story. And thank you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou.

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You did something after your wedding at Oahu Country Club.

[CHUCKLE] I did.

That is still remembered. What did you do?

We hired a bicycle built for two. So, after all the hoopla went on, we went out and got out bike, and pedaled through the port cochere waving, and headed out. [CHUCKLE] So, that was a little unusual.

The last your guests saw of you, you were on a bicycle built for two.

Right.

Heading out. [CHUCKLE]

We went so fast, I don't think anybody, including us, knew what was happening. [CHUCKLE]

[END]

