

GUEST: VICTOR MARX

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You know, most people who are victimized as a young kid will feel an X on them, 'cause it doesn't stop. It's typically not an incident. And for me, the instability of fourteen schools, seventeen different homes, all the different stepfathers coming in. You know, one's a murdered, one was in prison. I mean, just the craziness of it, you believe, that becomes normal as a kid. Again, you can't process as right. But for me, I will say this. I never wanted to give up, because I just kept thinking, When I'm older, when I'm older, I'm gonna have a good life.

Victor Marx survived the upheaval and abuse he suffered during his youth, growing up to become an excellent shooter in the U.S. Marine Corps, a martial arts master, and a weapons instructor. Now, he uses his lethal skills to heal troubled youth. Victor Marx, 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. Victor Marx is known for many things, including his seventh-degree black belt in Keichu-do karate and Jiu-jitsu, fourth-degree black belt in weapons, and a record time in fastest gun disarm. A resident of California, and the founder and president of All Things Possible Ministries, the Louisiana-born Marx once operated a martial arts business in Honolulu at the Ward Warehouse. At the time of our conversation in 2015, Marx travels around the world, offering hope to young people who are suffering from abuse. Before he was able to become an inspiration to others, though, he had to first recover from the severe trauma of his own childhood. In a way, it started even before he was born, in Lafayette, Louisiana.

I was born in the 60s, and I had three siblings already. My mother, who was young, she had her first child at sixteen. Their marriage didn't make it, and they were divorced when I was born. My father actually became a drug dealer and a pimp. And the night that I was conceived, he actually put a gun to her head. Didn't claim me when she was pregnant. He actually told her, That ain't mine.

Didn't call me a kid; he said, That ain't mine. Because she had gotten into other relationships already. And the next man she married we call Mr. K in the book. You know, this wasn't like some drug dealer on a street corner. This was an educated man who had served in the military, who had been in counterintelligence.

So, he seemed like a respectable man.

Correct. And at the time, he actually even owned a bookstore, a college bookstore. Hemmingway was one of his favorite reads. And you know, my mother—I think she was twenty-two at the time, four children. You know, she's thinking, Ah, okay. But something intuitively knew he was kinda messed up.

He was horrifying. He would torture you.

Yes. Yeah. Yeah; you know, there was perversion, but there was also intentional, what the experts would say, torture. You know, being electrocuted, being dunked in a tub until I would pass out. I remember waking up on the cold bathroom floor to him breathing into my mouth. And I'm sputtering. And he just said, Boy, don't ever forget I'm the one that gives you life. And those are what I call lies based on reality. And until you really come to exchange those out for what the truth is, a person will remain really hamstrung by what's happened in his childhood, 'cause that's implanted into you, becomes part of your fabric. 'Cause as kid, all you can process is ... I wasn't breathing, I am now, he was the one dunking me in the tub, holding me in. I guess he does give me life. Actually, I thought he was my biological dad. I wasn't told, you know. But I want to share this publicly. He wanted to seal to what he had done to me. And the way of protecting themselves, abusers will always use fear. Fear of death, or whatnot. And he actually had brought me to a house one night out in the country, early morning. It was a little wooden house, and there was single light in it. There was another guy, and there was a hole in the floor. It was wooden floor. And then a hole had been dug. And I thought at that point, This is when I'm gonna die. And you know, fear is a different thing. When you've experienced terror for a while, your mind associates. There's no fight left in you. You just yield. And for him, he was having a conversation with man. And I remember hearing the guy say, I don't want to do this anymore. And my stepfather was a very good communicator. He made him relax. He said, Oh, I understand. When the guy relaxed, he hit him. He cracked him and knocked him unconscious. And he was a fighter. But when he drops, he handcuffs him and he drags him up to this hole, pulls him up on his knees, handcuffed. And he pulls out a pistol, his pistol. He said, Come here, boy. And then, he put the gun in my hand said, You're gonna shoot this man. And he raised my hand. And the guy is semi-conscious, and he sees what's going on. Because I think he

thought this was what was gonna happen to me, and now it's happening to him. And you know, I have the pistol to the back of his head, and I remember trying to pull the trigger, and I couldn't. And I don't know if it was the pounds per square inch. You know, I was seven. But I'm squeezing, and I can't pull it. And I feel his hand come over and grab my wrist, and then his right hand comes around and he slips his finger over mine, and he presses until the revolver goes off. When it fired, it hit the guy in the back of his head, and it killed him. And then, you know, he pushed his body into the hole. And then he told me, Boy, you know, this is your first kill.

Wow.

And he buried him, and he took that pistol and wrapped it in a handkerchief. And he said, If you ever tell anyone what I've done to you, it doesn't matter how old you get, he said, I'll tell the police that you killed this man, and I have the pistol with your fingerprint on it. And he said, They'll electrocute you. And I knew what electrocution was, 'cause he'd done it a few times. And so, it sealed and instilled in me a fear where I never talked about that 'til I was an adult.

What a horrible thing. And your mother didn't know this, any of this stuff was happening?

She did not know.

Victor Marx acknowledges he can't substantiate this account. He said he as a kid did not know the location, the body was never found, and the crime was not reported. Marx's mother finally escaped from her marriage to Mr. K, but she continued to marry men who were abusive to her children. By the time he finished high school, Victor Marx had already been in trouble with the law. Rather than go to jail, he made a decision that took his life in an entirely new direction.

You didn't join the Marines 'cause you wanted to.

Well, yeah; it was ... again, at that point in my life, I'd just graduated high school. Hallelujah. But I was spiraling, using drugs, fighting, and stealing. And again, for me, stealing was my way to say, This world owes me, and they're gonna start paying me back. And every opportunity that I could take advantage, I would. But I got caught, and I was looking at being sentenced because of my stealing and getting in trouble. So, my best option at that point was to join the United States Marine Corps. And I did, and that's what really kept me from going to jail, 'cause they would have prosecuted me. And the

Corps was a very good thing for me, 'cause, one, it was structured, disciplined, and it showed me that life isn't about being fair. So just, you know, suck it up, buttercup, and time to do the deal. And it worked for me tremendously. And I really like the Marine Corps. Never loved it, but I liked it. So much, I put ink on my shoulder. And you know what? They were able to teach me skillsets I didn't have before, which gave me a level of confidence, including starting to train in the martial arts, shooting. You know, I hunted as a little kid, but when they taught me how to put ten rounds into a target of a man from five hundred and forty-six yards without a scope—

Wow.

--that gave me a skillset that, you know, felt good. And again, there was there, 'cause you know, I'm training, martial arts, karate, jujitsu, kempo, judo, anything I could, boxing. 'Cause I said, If I can't beat a man this way, I'll beat him this way, 'cause I never want to get hurt again. So, that was kinda my driver.

And you did well. But you didn't want to stay in; you left after, what, three years?

Yeah; I did one term of enlistment. And I had actually got in trouble while I was in, which I was facing, you know, brig time. Again, there was a pattern. 'Cause you can only do things for so long, but your character and your baby's gonna tell on you. And I was in trouble, was facing some stuff. And actually, this was when my biological dad came back into my life, which is really the redemptive aspect of this whole deal. You know, really, an absentee father all my life. At that point, I'm twenty. But really engaged me, apologized for not being a father. Which blew me away. He wanted to call me son in a letter, which made me mad, 'cause I thought, You don't have a right to call me son. But he told me had a spiritual encounter that really changed his life, and it's not about perfection, but the direction of his life had changed. So much so that he said, Why don't you come visit me? And the Marine Corps actually let me go visit him, 'cause they knew the circumstances, you know, I'd never known him. And they just said, You come back to face your court martial. I said, Okay. I said, I'll be back. And I went, and it was interesting getting to really spend time with him in depth.

This was the pimp. This was the guy who held a gun to your mother's head.

Yeah; yeah.

The guy who wouldn't claim you.

Yeah; by all means, he was a loser. He was a loser as a father, and had justified his own absentee. And so here he is; his life, I can tell is different. And okay, not perfect, but different. He cared about me, and I knew he wanted to make a new start. So, I gave him an opportunity, and it was really through seeing his faith of a life change that, you know, really impacted me so much that I had a life change through faith. And you know, I told him; I said, Well, I'm going back to face court martial. What should I do? And I had developed an elaborate lie—it was a pretty good lie, to try to get me out of it. Which it wouldn't have, but your mind thinks it will. I'll never forget; he looked at me and he said, Son ... learn from me. Just tell the truth. 'Cause a lie, you gotta keep it going. And I was like, Okay. I went back, and I actually told them the truth. You know, I didn't fight it; I said, I'm guilty. You know, I told them; I said, I was gonna lie. You know, I said, but here's the truth. I did this, this, and I deserve my punishment. And they were actually so taken back, because my nickname, my handle on the Marine Corps was Thumper.

'Cause you were a hothead?

I was a hothead. I tell people it was because I like the little Bambi bunny.

You know, in the movie, the little bunny, Thumper. But it's because I liked to thump people back then. And so, they were all shocked, and I'll never forget the commanding officer who presided over it, he said, Well, this is a shock. And he goes, You are gonna pay the price for the crime, you're breaking the code of military justice. He said, But I'm gonna suspend the sentence; you won't have to do brig time, but I'm keeping you to your barracks. Which was unbelievable. And it really was the first time in my life, first time, that I thought, Telling the truth is a better way to go.

And was your dad for real? Had he really had a conversion?

He did.

He changed?

He did. Which, it stuck all the years until his passing. You know, twenty-something years. And again, I'm grateful that coming to faith or you know, finding a higher power, it's not about perfection. But the direction of your life changes. And you know what? It not only worked for him, it worked for me.

Victor Marx's acceptance of his father didn't turn his life around immediately. He would still have to come to terms with the trauma of his childhood before he could start to put it behind him. And his newfound faith would play an important role in his healing.

I can see you saying, Why did God allow all that to happen to me? Why couldn't He have kept me from some of it and distribute it equally?

Right. You know what? That is such a great question, and one that anybody who's suffered, it's an honest question.

Right. It's the old, Why me?, question.

Yeah.

A variation of.

Right. And for me, it came in a dramatic form where, you know ... because you know, I'd been to church as kid, and those things. You know, Jesus loves all the little children of the world. And I'm like, Yeah. No, I believed that, 'cause He's good, so He loves all the kids, just not me. That's how you start to process it as a kid, because bad things happen. And I'll never forget when it changed for me. And it was actually a counseling appointment, as a result of it. This old country boy counselor, boot-wearing Texas guy. And he was just like, Hey. But he had all kinda degrees on his wall, so he knew what he was doing. He just said, Well, you know, where was God in all this? If He's so loving, and He can stop evil, why did He allow it to happen to you? He said, Why don't you ask Him? And I remember telling him, You need to shut up. That you need to just stand down; that's not a question I need to ask God. And he's like, Why not? Because ... and this is real, and it's deep, but people who've been ... people who over a lifetime or a number of years have experienced disappointment and failure again, and again, and again, and you assign it to God, you know, Why don't you give me a better break, why don't you give me better parents, I mean, I'm stuck in hell, or whatever it is ... to ask God that question, for me, I'd rather have a false hope than not have ... the right answer, and have my hope dashed forever. And people in their heart know if they're living off of false hope. Well, He's—oh, and it's okay. But the reality is in your heart; you're just too scared.

Well, I can also see you having a really difficult time with this, because if God is your Heavenly Father ... you know, the fatherhood record was really bad on this Earth.

Exactly. And it is hard not to assign that. I remember when someone first told me, Oh, God is your Heavenly Father. It was so offensive to me. I thought ... uh, negative. You're kidding me? But in my mind, I thought, Well, He must be some sadistic, crazy, unloving God. Maybe somebody else. You know, I'm the stepchild. You know, I'm getting the leftovers. But what changed my life and the lie that I believed is, I finally asked God that question.

What were the circumstances of asking Him?

I was in a counseling appointment, and I just said, God, where were you? You know, Jesus, if you're so loving and you love the kids, what about me? Why did you allow it to happen to me? I'll never forget, I remember my eyes were closed, and I saw the room, a room where a lot of abuse had happened. And I saw it so clearly, and I saw my stepfather, had a beer in his hand, he had a belt wrapped around his hand. He was getting ready to, you know, beat me with it. He had me lay down on the bed in my underwear; he would just—you know. And I saw everything so clearly. And then, I saw what I knew to be an image of Christ, a spiritual being appearing. And I thought, Okay, great; now turn and touch my stepfather's heart and blow it out, kill him right now. That's what I wanted, remembering this. But it would have been the truth. It would have been my own fantasy. The reality of what really happened to me was, right before he got ready to hit me, my stepfather is rearing back, I'm grabbing the sheets. 'Cause the way he would hit you, he would hit you, bam [SLAP], and then he would wait. He'd wait 'til all your little muscles relaxed from being tense in anticipation, you relax, and boom [SLAP], he'd hit you again. And he'd do it slow, until you gave up, 'til there was no more fight in you. And right before he hit me, this image of Christ turned, kneeled, and placed his body on top of mine and sunk into mine so that He would take the greatest part of the beating for me, to allow me to survive. And I knew, if that's a God who loves me and will share my suffering, that's a God I can trust. I think God's heart breaks for all the injustices that happen, all the evil. That's not what He wants; it's never what He's assigning to children. You know, it's the choice of evil people making horrible choices.

Victor Marx turned his skill in martial arts into a business, and he started teaching karate. He met Aileen, another believer, and a nationally recognized fitness instructor. She was at the leading edge of fitness kickboxing. And soon, they began working together, opening their own gym after they were married. An invitation from a youth pastor in Honolulu to teach a Christian karate school brought Marx and his growing family to the islands. Despite all the good things happening in his life, he still could not shake the horrors of his past.

I like that martial arts, good martial arts, does have a way to teach a person a code of honor, and understand the impact you can make on someone. So, I've used it for good. When we had our martial arts center here underneath, you know, the Spaghetti Factory at the Ward Warehouse as one of our locations, we had so many people come in to fight me because I'm this Haole from the mainland, and you know, what are you doing here? And, you know, some things got physical, which changed some people's minds or hurt some people's feelings, because they tried to get physical. But I made more friends. You know, I was able to use my words, not necessarily my fists or chokes, or cracking somebody. But it gives you a level of confidence that in a situation. You know, I'm looking at young guy who's like, Oh, you're so good. I'm thinking, Oh, my gosh.

You sound like you speak Pidgin. You've got that inflection.

Hey, we were here long enough. My children were raised here, my first three. When we went back to the mainland, I'll never forget; my son's out playing in the yard. He comes back, he's playing with kids there. He goes, Dad; he said, there's so many White kids here.

I said, Come here. I said, You are white. And he's like, Oh, oh! So, you know, he got his Pidgin, still talks Pidgin. So, I love the islands. I have a little home here. We consider this home. We spent so many years here, through good and bad times.

How many years here?

We were here '95 to '01.

And you say some of them weren't good years?

No. I mean, I had challenges emotionally that people didn't know about.

Ah ...

Right? It was part of my healing. You know, in martial arts, in many ways, I've reached the pinnacle. At least for myself. Here in Hawaii, huge student enrollment, you know, large staff. I mean, we were making an impact. 'Cause after we got over the few things, people realized, Oh, you care about our keiki. And then, training adults. Yeah. And you know, we brought the fitness kickboxing here; it was just great. It was a great time. But I was having

emotional problems hidden, and I would never tell anybody. Nobody knew that I was at Queen's in an observation room, because I had horrible thoughts about hurting myself, or other people. You know. But I chose in that moment to go, I'm so unstable at this moment. You know. We lived at the top of Tantalus, you know, and man, I was having bad thoughts about, Oh, I have a good insurance policy, and I'm causing so much pain for my wife, you know, through my behavior, and all this. I'm like, you know, Maybe I should just end it, let her take the money and go. And I tell people, when someone wants to commit suicide, it's not always just a rash deal. Sometimes it seems like a logical answer. I tell folks, it's a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Don't give up; get help. And I did, particularly that night by driving down, checking myself into Queen's, and I'm glad I did.

So, you're saying that when you accepted God, accepted Jesus into your life, it wasn't like it took away all your pain and problems.

No. It took away my past sin, because that's what He promises, to lift the burden; that's what the scriptures say. But it didn't take away the challenges I would have because of my past. But the greatest thing is, He promised me He would redeem it. And I love redemption. You know, redemption is when somebody drinks a soda, throws the can side of the road, someone else comes by and says, Eh, this trash to you, but it's money to me. And that's what God did for me; He picked me up. He said, Other people consider you trash; I'll redeem your life, watch what I do. And again, sometimes the greatest faith is just never giving up.

Do you have flashbacks?

Seldom anymore, because of the counseling and therapy I've gone through. But I still feel deeply. And what I'm glad about now is, my suffering has been turned. That purpose; I've learned the purpose. There is a purpose in the pain, is to help others who are still suffering, you give them hope. And that's what I feel like I'm called to do.

Through their All Things Possible Ministries, Victor and Aileen Marx have dedicated themselves to advocating for youth who are troubled and abused. They help people, including war veterans who've suffered trauma, and they travel around the world to facilitate the rescue of children who've been abducted and trafficked. Mahalo to Victor Marx, now of Marietta, California, for sharing your 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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My story is one of redemption. 'Cause a lot of people experience abuse and injustice in their life, but I'm pretty happy to share. That's why we do it so much. And actually, I didn't do it 'til later in life. I was in my late thirties before I started telling my story.

Is that because you didn't want everyone to know the gory details?

Yes. You know, I stayed away from it because, really, in a lot of ways, I hadn't healed from some of the trauma of the past. So, you use coping mechanisms, whether it's excelling at a certain thing or staying away from other things so you don't get triggered, or never wanting to revisit any of that. I kinda used all of 'em in that way to protect myself. But when I took time and really trusted that the process of going through healing and counseling would make the greater difference in my life, it's turned out really good, not only for me, but helping others.