

GUEST: MICHAEL BRODERICK

LSS 718 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 3/18/14

And then, when I left being a judge, here's what people say to me: Michael, you look pretty good. And I say, Well, gee, what did I look like before? They say, You looked like you were carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders. I wasn't even aware of that.

Michael Broderick has altered his career path several times over the years, but he's always been guided by his strong sense of family and community. YMCA of Honolulu President and CEO, Michael Broderick, 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. In 2010, Hawaii Family Court Judge Michael Broderick stepped down from the bench at a time when he appeared to be at the height of his career. His concerns about Hawaii's youth and the community led him to a new calling as President and CEO of the YMCA of Honolulu. Broderick has spent a large portion of his career looking out for people and families. His own life started with a devastating loss.**

Where did life begin for you? What was it like?

Well, I was born in Dallas, Texas, and lived there for four months. And then, my father was killed in a car accident when I was four months old.

Four months!

Yeah. And so, we moved back to Philadelphia, where my aunt lived, my mother's sister, and my aunt's husband, my uncle, and their four boys. So, my brother, who at the time was two years old, and myself and my mom, moved into that house. And there was also our grandmother, who was there as well.

Oh, multigenerational family.

Multigenerational.

Extended family.

Extended; and Italian. Okay; that's key.

So, everything was big family table of meals.

Absolutely. We all sat down together for dinner every night, the ten of us, and we had a beautiful Italian meal that my grandmother had cooked. So, I was raised by my grandmother, a hundred percent Italian; my uncle, hundred percent Italian; my aunt, one hundred percent Italian; and my mother, one hundred percent Italian.

And so, what does that mean to you when you explain that you're fully Italian, through and through?

I think there's a certain passion that comes with being Italian. I have great pride in the culture. Obviously, I love Italian food. But I think most of the Italians are about family; family is really important to them. And so, I was raised to really cherish and value my family.

And yet, here you were at such a young age, missing a key part of a family.

Yes.

Can you talk a little bit about what you lost?

Yeah. That's a great question, and probably five or ten years ago, I would have cried in response to it. I won't cry tonight, 'cause I'm kinda past that phase. But the thing that losing a father has done for me is, there's kind of a hole inside you. And what I've found over the years is that hole gets less and less, and less, as you meet people that care about you, as you get married, have your own children. But I don't think you can ever replace losing a father.

Is it a feeling of insecurity?

Well, I think that it's a feeling of not having had a completely healthy, normal childhood. I think all the studies show that the best childhood is one where there's a husband and there's a wife. And I didn't have that. I didn't have a father and a mother. I had a mother and wonderful uncle, and a wonderful aunt, and a wonderful grandmother, but none of them were my father. And so, I felt that loss throughout my life.

I know you've read the studies more than I have, probably, that boys who grow up without a father, for whatever reason, whether it's divorce or just absenteeism, or death, are more likely to have emotional or behavioral difficulties. They may get more into crime, they tend to be more on the poverty level.

Mm.

And they tend more to suicide.

Yeah. The good news is, I haven't had any poverty or crime, or those things. I have felt that there's a good side to it, as well. I think losing your father makes you more sensitive. I think it makes you more empathetic. And I think as a Family Court judge -- and we can talk about that later, but as a Family Court judge, I think I was able to bring a certain sensitivity and compassion, and empathy to that job, because I had lost my father. Many of the young men or women who appeared before me had lost a parent, or had something traumatic happen to them in childhood. And I felt a connection, and also, I felt I had a certain credibility because I had been where they had been. So, you

ask, are there good things that come of it? I think there are. Would I have preferred to have had my dad? Absolutely. Is it something that I still long for? Absolutely. But is it all bad? No; I don't think so. I think there are some very positive things. And the other positive thing is, my four cousins, I view as my brothers. So, instead of having one brother, I have five brothers. And that can only be a good thing.

From his teenage years, Michael Broderick began to eye a career in political office. He attended Stanford University, UCLA Law School, and then was hired for his dream job with Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. It seemed that the path to politics lay before him.

So, you're growing up in Philadelphia.

Right.

And, what were your aspirations?

I would say at about fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, I wanted to go into elected office. I wanted to be a politician.

Were you the guy at school who ran for student council, and ...

I'll tell you a fun story, and I hope it doesn't sound arrogant. I went to a new school when I was in ninth grade, and at the end of ninth grade, the headmaster called the ninth grade together and asked them to elect a president. And they elected me; which I felt very good about. Tenth grade, the same thing happened. Eleventh grade, the same thing happened. You didn't run for president of our school. A day was announced in the spring when they voted for the president, and I was blessed to be voted president.

You didn't have to run for office.

I didn't run for office.

That doesn't happen in the real world, of course. [CHUCKLE]

No, it doesn't. And I didn't have to raise any money. But what happened down the road in my career is, I worked for a politician. I worked for Tom Bradley, who was the Mayor of Los Angeles.

What did you do for him?

I was a speechwriter for him, I was his policy person on certain subjects, and I was his liaison with the Los Angeles Police Department, with Daryl Gates. And I saw the mayor's life. I saw his lack of privacy, I saw the interruptions, I saw the criticism, and I realized that I had thin skin. Okay; I do not have thick skin. So, if I wake up in the morning and there's something in the newspaper criticizing Michael Broderick, that does not roll off of me. That cuts deep to me. And maybe that's not having a father, in terms of the insecurity. I don't know.

Also, if family is the most important thing, that doesn't allow --

It doesn't.

-- you to put family first all the time.

It doesn't. And I'll tell you a fun story. It's not fun, but it's a compelling story. Tom Bradley told me that he went home on a Friday night to watch a DVD movie with his family. Couldn't get through it. Why couldn't he get through it? 'Cause he got a call from the police chief, he got a call from the fire chief, he got a call from his chief of staff about an emergency. He tried to watch that DVD four Fridays in a row, and never got through it with his family. So, I saw the life of a politician, and I realized that I had to be honest with myself. And I said, You know what, Michael, it's really not you.

But you like the idea of being a leader and being around people, and mobilizing

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Absolutely.

-- **things.**

That, I love.

Michael Broderick married his college sweetheart, Maile Meyer, an entrepreneurial Hawaiian - Chinese woman and force of nature from Kailua, in Windward Oahu. Maile is best known today as the founder of Native Books, a Hawaiian bookstore. But back when they lived on the West Coast and were visiting Hawaii, Michael experienced the Aloha Spirit, and made a life - changing decision.

I had my dream job with Tom Bradley. I loved the job; it was fascinating. And we decided to visit Maile's family in Hawaii over Christmas.

Because you and Maile had met at Stanford University.

Maile and I had met at Stanford. We were nineteen when we met. We're fifty - six now, so we've grown up together. Maile's family was still living in Kailua. We came back -- this was 1985, and I went to a football game at Aloha Stadium. It must have been the Aloha Bowl; it was in December. It started to rain. And on the screen they flashed: Now that the weather has become inclement -- that's the word they used. Now that the weather has become inclement, please use your poncho instead of your umbrella so the person behind you can see; mahalo. Now, remember, I'm living in Los Angeles. And I looked at that, and I said, That is very cool.

What would they have said in Los Angeles?

Nothing.

[CHUCKLE] Like, do whatever it takes to see that game.

They wouldn't have done anything like that in Los Angeles. The game ends; an hour later, the game ends and they flash on the screen: Now that the game is over, look and see if your neighbor has left anything of value; and if they have, gently tap them on the shoulder. Mahalo. I drove home to Kailua from Aloha Stadium and I told Maile, We're moving to Hawaii.

Which you knew she wanted to do; right?

Which I did know she wanted to do. But she had been very, very understanding about my desire to work for Tom Bradley. So, there was no pressure. That's how I got here.

Because you love those values.

Exactly. What I saw in those two signs was community and value, integrity, warmth. Aloha, basically. And I didn't feel that in Los Angeles. So, nine months later, we were in Hawaii.

And then, you had to start from scratch as far as a job?

Well, what I did was, when I was working with Tom Bradley, I sent resumes and cover letters to some prominent law firms in Hawaii and was fortunate enough to get some offers. So, when I moved back, I had a job with the Carlsmith firm. Yeah.

But you didn't stay long?

The private practice of law is extremely important work. It is of great significance to the client, and it's very intellectually stimulating. But it had no personal meaning to me.

What kind of law were you doing with them?

I was doing labor law, employment law, representing management. So, you don't pick and choose the cases you work on. You're told what cases --

You'd rather be the guy on the other side of some issues.

Yeah; that's right. And the other thing I found out as I worked in labor law as an advocate was that I was much more comfortable as the neutral. I was much more comfortable as the person in the middle. So, what I found myself doing was trying to solve these cases, instead of advocating for my client. And that's when I realized I really should be in mediation. I see an advertisement in the paper; it's for the director of the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution. I apply for the job, and I'm interviewed by a three-person panel, one of the people being, at the time, Associate Justice Ronald Moon, who I had never met, knew nothing about. As the interview is unfolding, one of the three panelists asks me kind of an inappropriate question. [CHUCKLE] And the CJ at the time, Associate Justice Moon, looks at me and goes ... he winks.

[CHUCKLE]

As if to say, Michael, I know that was an inappropriate question, just hang in there with us. I loved it. You know. So, at the end of the interview, I went home and Maile said, How'd the interview go? And I said, You know, I don't know how the interview went, but I met this incredibly cool guy. And that was Ron Moon. And they hired me for the job. But I'll tell you a funny story. I get a call from his executive assistant, and she says, Come in, you've made the final list. So, it's now down to three. But Associate Justice Moon has asked you to relax. Okay.

Because you were a Type A, L.A. guy?

I said to myself, What does that mean, relax? I think he's trying to tell me that I was a little too ... aggressive. So, I went into the final interview, much less

aggressive, much more Hawaii style. Got the job. He hires me, and as he brings me in to tell me I got the job, he said, Michael, do you know how many times you pulled up your socks during the original interview? And I said, No.

[GASP]

He said, I counted; twenty - three times.

You just reached down --

I reached down --

-- and you were tugging.

-- and pulled up my sock. Obviously, unbeknownst to me, a nervous habit. He said, Do you know how many times you pulled up your socks in the final interview, the one that I had you relax? I said, No. He said, Once.

Wow.

So, I said, CJ, thank you. And that was the beginning of a twenty, now twenty - three - year relationship with a guy that I would consider my mentor. That's how it started.

So, you get the job.

I got the job.

Was that a good fit?

It was a perfect fit. Because I was interested in being a mediator, I was interested in being a third party neutral. And as the director of the Center for ADR, what's what you do. You set up mediation programs, you help set up arbitration programs, and you also mediate and facilitate cases yourself. So, it was a perfect fit.

Years later, Hawaii Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald Moon, now retired, would hire Michael Broderick again; this time, to serve as the Administrative Director of the Courts, a position that required him to manage all of the Hawaii State judges and other eighteen hundred employees in Hawaii's judicial system. Broderick admits it was a tough assignment, and it also led him to another career change.

As the director of the courts, I had had a chance to observe all the different courts; Circuit Court, the Appellate Courts, District Court, and Family Court. And I felt that there was a contribution I could make in Family Court. So, I applied to be a judge, was fortunate to get on the list of six, the Judicial Selection Commission put me on the list of six. And then, guess who's the appointing authority? Chief Justice Ronald Moon, who appointed me. And I'll always be grateful for that. And so, for seven and a half years, I was a Family Court judge. Had more than ten thousand cases in Family Court.

Did you think that was the job at which you would retire?

I wasn't sure. What I did know was that as long as I was gonna be a judge, I was gonna be a Family Court judge. I had no interest in being a Circuit Court judge, I had no interest in being an Appellate Court judge, I had no interest in being a

Supreme Court justice. I wanted to be a Family Court judge. Whether it was gonna be the job I would retire from, I didn't know. I saw themes in Family Court. I saw drug addiction, particularly ice, mental illness, homelessness, domestic violence. Those are four things that kind of rose to the top. And kids who were totally disengaged from their families and from their communities, and from their schools. So, the Child Protective Services calendar are young girls and young boys who have been sexually abused or physically abused. And the judge is deciding whether to terminate the parental rights of the parents. I can't think of more important work than that. Temporary restraining order cases; women coming in -- primarily women, sometimes men, but primarily women coming in and alleging that they've been physically or sexually abused by their spouse, or by a boyfriend. I can't think of a more important case than that. Juvenile criminal cases; young men and young women, sixteen and seventeen, coming before you who have been charged with a crime, and you decide whether to send them to drug treatment, or whether to send them to prison. To me, these cases matter. Okay. They're not about money. I'm not about money. So, I wasn't interested in being a judge and presiding over cases that were about money. I was interested in being a judge and presiding over cases that were about people.

Michael Broderick recalls presiding over more than ten thousand cases in Family Court. As time went on, he began to wonder if he was in the right place to make a positive difference with the youth and families in Hawaii. He admits being frustrated that he could not truly help many of the young people who appeared before him in court.

I'll tell you a story that was one of the saddest cases I ever had. I had sent one kid to prison. They call it Hawaii Correctional Facility, but let's be honest; it's like a prison. I had sent one kid there, and then another judge had sent another kid there, and they both ran away at the same time. They were able to escape. Well, one of them had a serious medical condition that if he was not found within, I believe at the time it was forty-eight hours, he was gonna die. So, we found the other kid, and we brought him into my courtroom. I can't remember his name. Let's say his name is John. I said, John, do you know where Billy is? Do you know where he is? He said, Yeah, I know where he is. I said, Okay; if we don't find Billy in now twenty-four hours, he's gonna die. Do you understand that? I understand that. Where is Billy? I'm not telling you where Billy is. Billy died. Okay? Now, for that kid who was in front of me, that wasn't prepared to tell me where Billy was, knowing that he would die if we didn't find him, for me that was too late. I'm not gonna be able to help that young man. He was seventeen at the time. On my domestic violence calendar, it was not unusual for me to have guys come before me who had thirty to thirty-five criminal convictions over the course of twenty, twenty-five years, also to have a crystal

meth addiction, to be schizophrenic. I felt, with those folks, there was really very little that I could do. I often found myself wanting to go visit the young kids that I sent to the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility. As a judge, I can't do that, for so many reasons. So, there were some restrictions around being a judge. All those restrictions make sense, they're there for food reasons; but they were starting to become impediments to me. Now, I need to be fair. I saw miracles happen in Family Court. Okay? I saw a woman who was a drug addict; she said, Judge, take my child. I said, What do you mean, take your child? Take him. I love him, but I love ice more. I returned that child to her two years later, because she went through treatment and got it together. That's a miracle. So, I don't want to paint a picture of Family Court that good things don't happen, because miracles happen in Family Court. Unfortunately, the numbers are not as high as you would want. When I talk about being a Family Court judge, I talk about it as a privilege. It was an honor. But after seven and a half years, and ten thousand cases, the suffering and the misery kinda got to me. And for many of the cases, I felt I couldn't help them. I felt it was too late. So, most of the folks that appeared before me had been traumatized as children, many of them had been sexually abused and physically abused. They had been ice addicts for many, many years, or alcoholics for many, many years, had long, long, long lists of criminal convictions. So, for a lot of the people that appeared before me, I felt it was too late; I couldn't help them. The YMCA, I had been on the board of the YMCA and I saw the prevention work they do, the frontend work around drug treatment, around gang prevention. And I said, You know what? I think maybe I'd rather spend the last ten years of my career, the final ten years of my career on the frontend of the continuum, on the prevention end.

Michael Broderick says that decision to step down as a judge to work in the private nonprofit sector may have puzzled some people. But like every other career decision he had made before, his family supported his decision.

People who don't know me would say, How could you leave that prestigious, prominent position that was so hard to get? People that knew me, people that know me completely got it. When I was sworn in as a judge, which is a pretty big deal, there are a lot of people there. And I said, Maile, I have taken three jobs in a row, and each job I've earned less money. And every time, my wife was thrilled for me. After I said that, the induction was over, and we had food for people to share. This is a true story. I had three different women come up to me, independent of each other, and say, Is that true about your wife, she actually supported you taking jobs that paid less? And I said, It is absolutely true. And each of them said, I would never support that for my husband.

Whoa.

That was really ... I don't want to say an eye-opener, because I already knew how cool Maile was. But it was a reaffirmation that I'm living with a special lady.

Michael Broderick made the transition from Family Court judge to CEO of the YMCA of Honolulu, one of Hawaii's largest private nonprofit organizations. He directed his passion for children and the community to the Y. Many YMCA programs focus on the early intervention of social issues at the core of Family Court, such as substance abuse and child welfare. He loved his new career; however, just a couple of years into the job, he received some troubling personal news.

I was diagnosed with cancer prostate cancer, and I had surgery. And then I had some complications from the surgery around some chronic pain. And what's changed as a result of that is, for the first two year on the job, I worked every weekend, every single weekend, usually both days. So, if not six and a half days a week, seven days a week. The cancer diagnosis, speaking to you honestly, was a shock. I was fifty - six at the time, I was in great shape, weight - wise, I wasn't heavy, and all of a sudden I have prostate cancer. And I had a tumor on my prostate, which meant that perhaps it had gone fairly far. So, I then had surgery, and then I had the complications and the pain, some of which I'm still dealing with now. And as a result of that experience, I don't work nearly as many weekends now. Because I'm about to turn fifty - seven, and I've got a little bit of perspective on life, and I think that the work will still be there on Monday. Monday through Friday, I'm working really hard. And some Saturdays, I'm working at the Y if it's a Y function. I've worked the last two Saturdays, and I'll work the next two Saturdays because of the Y functions, but I'm not going into the office nearly as much. And that is as a result of having cancer, and kind of reevaluating some things.

At the time of this conversation in 2014, Michael Broderick is still experiencing the pain left by those complications. But he remains fully committed to working for the community.

Now, having moved from Family Court and you're in this frontend line of work with kids, has that brought you the kind of results or feeling that results are -- you're on the verge of?

Yes. It's been very gratifying for me. The other thing is, and this sounds a little trite; it's been more fun. Maile reminds me, I need more fun in my life. I mentioned that I went to an event on Saturday at Aloha Stadium, where we had some former NFL players. We had about three hundred young kids who come from difficult backgrounds. They met the NFL players. It's called NFL Play60. Then they went through drills over the course of an hour. I got to see the smiles on those kids' faces. And next week, I go the Youth In Government opening ceremonies. I'm gonna get to see the high school governor sworn in,

for example, and the sergeant at arms sworn in. Those things are really joyful for me. And I find that I need that.

YMCA of Honolulu President and CEO Michael Broderick says he's been given the opportunity of a lifetime to help children and families by helping to prevent the kind of traumas and tragedies he witnessed as a Family Court judge. He says he's excited about running the Y until it's time for him to retire. Mahalo to Michael Broderick for sharing his story 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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The greatest surprise for me is, I have not met a jerk yet. The people that work at the Y are really kind people. Now, people say to me, Well, yeah, that's because you were around lawyers for, twenty - five years.

[CHUCKLE] Well, that's 'cause you're the boss. Yes, Mr. Broderick. [CHUCKLE] You know, I watch people, how they relate to each other, when they don't know I'm watching. So, the greatest surprise for me and the greatest positive surprise has been how neat the people are who work at the Y.