

# LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



**TITLE: ROSE GALERA**

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Mrs. Bennett taught me an awful lot. She taught me how to speak English, of course. You know, Haole, you know, and—

**So, you were speaking what kind of English?**

Well, broken English, Pidgin. I remember pronunciation from what I learned and everything in school, but then, she taught me about the finer things. She would entertain from time to time, so she taught me how to set tables. She taught me about silver, how to polish silver. She taught me about the finer things of dishes and china, and all. And I learned about all those things, and over the years, I appreciated that. I remember for my wedding, she gave me one of her silver platters. You know. But this was sterling, sterling silver, you know, which is, I know, expensive today. Not silver-plated, you know. So, I learned the different values of something that's silver-plated versus sterling.

**For five years during her middle and high school years, Rose Galera left her crowded Kalihi home to live with the Bennett family at Navy housing. Lessons that she learned from Mrs. Bennett were instrumental in a career in what she calls “cleanology”, a consulting career that has taken her around the world. Rose Galera, 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. Rosita Abarca Galera, who's better known as Rose, developed a passion for cleaning at a young age. She grew up with eleven siblings in the 1930s and 40s, and her mother made sure every household member helped keep the house clean. Rose Galera discovered early on that she could earn money outside the home with the skills she learned from her mother, which led to her becoming a live-in nanny.**

I was born on the Big Island, in Hilo. And actually, we left Hilo when I was about seven, eight years old. We came from the Big Island to Oahu by boat. It was quite interesting. Took a few days, and then when we got to Oahu, right away, we moved in with my grandparents. My grandparents um, we called them Ah Po. Ah Po in Chinese means

Grandma. And my grandma was very small, and my grandpa was very big. So, we called them Small Ah Po and Big Ah Po. You know.

**And where's the Chinese from?**

Actually, no, I guess it's something that was just carried, you know, when they came from the Philippines, and the family just used that. Ah Po was easier; that time, we didn't use the term grandma or grandpa.

**When you say we, how big is we, the family who moved in with the Big and Small Ah Po?**

I come from a family of twelve. We were just there for a short while, until we got a home, actually in what was called Kalihi Royal Homes. And what it is, was a community of actually, apartments. If I remember correctly, it was canec type built apartments, and in each building there was like four units.

**What's there now?**

Actually, it's where Kuhio Park Terrace area is.

**Okay.**

I loved that area. And we would walk. Our parents didn't drive, and pick us up and drop us off. You know, we walked every day to school, walked to church, and that's how I feel, that I've learned to become a survivor, you know, today, because of the upbringing that I had. Then I went to Kalakaua. From Fern School, I went to Kalakaua Intermediate, and then from Kalakaua Intermediate, I went to Farrington High School.

**So, when you say you learned to be a survivor, what did you have to survive?**

Well, because the family, you know, we were on welfare, and you know, we were very careful about how we ate, what we ate. We didn't, you know, waste anything. My mother was very strict when it came to the home, keeping clean and everything. I was trained, every morning when you get up, you fix your bed, things are always straightened up. And in the old days, it doesn't happen today, we washed our clothes, we starched our clothes, and we ironed our clothes.

**An iron; I haven't seen one of those in a while. [CHUCKLE]**

Yeah. And actually, before becoming a nanny for the Bennetts, I ironed for about a year for a family, and I was at that time beginning of intermediate, for a family where she had girls. And it was all starched clothes, so they would bring the bag of clothes to

me, I would sprinkle it up, roll it up, put it into the refrigerator for a little while, and then I would start ironing. So, I was good at ironing; you know, ironing clothes, and she would pay me ten cents apiece. And that was one of the first job I had as a youngster, because my mom taught us how to wash the clothes, how to hang the clothes, how to starch the clothes, how to sprinkle.

**And you said she was particular about it.**

Oh, my mom was very—yeah, she was a housewife; she didn't work. But she made sure that we were trained. And my father, 'cause he was working at Hickam Air Force Base, and I would be the one making his lunch every morning so that he could take it to work. And I remember boiling eggs all the time, you know. And actually, because of those kinds of training, I've learned how to do things on my own, and how to take care of yourself.

**It sounds like with all those kids, you still knew that you had a place there, and you had a role to play, and everybody cooperated.**

We got along. You know. There was no time to fight or anything because, you know, we were busy with taking care of things around the house, taking care of each other. You know, our beds, we would share. You know, three of us in a room, you know, because we had a big family. But yeah, through those growing up years, it really made me strong. And then, when I was going to Kalakaua Intermediate, a friend of mine said, Rose, do you want to babysitting job? And I said, Okay. And so, she said, Go see these people and go for an interview. So, I went to the Bennetts' home, and I got the job with Mrs. Bennett.

**Who are the Bennetts?**

Mrs. Bennett and Commander Bennet actually lived in Navy housing. And that's where a lot of us who were in middle school or intermediate school then, the girls, we used to all go do babysitting work and what have you. But I got a regular job with Mr. Bennett.

**Now, did you walk all the way to Navy housing?**

No; I from school, I would get the bus, and then get off at Navy housing there.

**How far away is that?**

Actually, from Kalakaua Intermediate then, not too bad, not too far. And then, it came to a point where I ended up living with the Bennetts. Because Mrs. Bennett felt that it might be better, so I lived with the Bennetts for a little over five years.

**And what did you do for them?**

Actually, I would go to school, and after school, I would go home. I'd go home to the Bennetts', and at that time, there was two children, Peggy and Barbie. And they were about three and four years old, five years old. I would take them to the park, play with them a little bit, then bring them home, and then made sure they took a bath and everything. And then, Mrs. Bennett by that time would have had dinner ready, and then we would have dinner, and then I'd put the girls to bed. This was about maybe oh, before eight o'clock. Then I would do my little homeworks that I had, and then go to bed. Then in the morning, I would get up and then go to school. And she paid me at that time, I always remembered, sixty dollars a month. You know. And that was good money then.

**That was big money those days.**

That was good money then. Yes.

**Rose Galera married her schoolmate, Manuel Galera, instead of finishing high school. She and Manuel had five children over the next nine years, while both worked at different jobs. After eighteen years of marriage, Rose divorced Manuel. But their story was not over; she remarried him fifteen years later.**

**You're one of the few people around who got married, divorced, and then years later, you married the same person. Tell us about that.**

Well ... this was in the 70s, and I ended up with a good job working for the Army. And you know, you get to meet other people as well. I was more involved than my husband was. I loved my husband dearly; we were high school sweethearts. And so, when we went through the divorce in 1972, we agreed, but our goal was, even though we would be divorced, we would make sure we would take care of the kids, the children.

**But why did you get divorced, if ...**

Actually, it was me; I think I grew out of the marriage. And then, I met a friend, you know, but I didn't remarry again or anything. I lived for about maybe eight years with who was, I thought, another mentor. And he was a boss at one time when I worked with the Youth Activity Center. But he taught me about the work life and everything, and he was like a psychiatrist to me. You know. And I lived with him for a little while, about eight years. But he was the one that encouraged me. Rose, go see your family on weekends, that's okay, Manuel's there, no problem. That was my husband. And so, I had good relationships with both sides. And one of the things my husband and I said, we want to take care of the kids, we want to make sure they're okay, their schooling and everything. So, you know, Junior graduated and Darrel graduated, went to

University. Carla graduated, and she went into actually beauty school. And then there's Jeffrey; Jeffrey's my baby, fifty years old baby. Manuel and I then, in about the 1980s, we got together again, and we lived a little while together, and then we said, Let's get married again. So, we went through again a second church marriage. I was able to get married in the church again, because I didn't remarry, and even though we had a divorce. So, it was at Our Lady of Good Counsel, where I go to regularly every day, that we remarried again. And the nice thing about that wedding was, my children were all, you know, part of the package and everything.

**It all seems so calm, but it's not really a situation that usually leads to calm.**

No; Manny and I got along well. I would go over the weekend, help them cook, and we would celebrate all of the special type of holidays together; Christmas, New Year's. You know, and I would always go over to help cook dinners and cook breakfast or things for them. We had a good relationship, and I think it had to do with the spiritual upbringing that we both had.

**How does this spiritual belief help you in your daily life?**

You know, I get angry sometimes, but then always is, you know, the prayers, daily prayers. I find myself always doing the sign of the cross as I'm driving, or when, you know, I'm walking, or when I'm talking. It really becomes a part of me. You know, and actually, it is important; you know, very, very important. The Lord has blessed me, I feel that, with family, with my children. I have actually three boys and one daughter. And they're all busy now with their own lives and everything, but I'm glad that they're all in good health, they've got good jobs.

**While Rose Galera was raising her children, she continued to work outside the home, too. An opportunity to enter the cleaning profession came up during this time, and that's when her career started to take off.**

I looked back to when I was a nanny, you know, 'cause I had experience there, learning how to clean and everything, and taking care of things. And then, I worked for the Army at the Schofield Barracks guest house, and I was at that time, a front desk clerk and a supervisor. But how I got that guest house job, which is people would come in and stay there; it's like a little hotel. Because I was working for the Navy too, at the service station, but because I had what was called NAFE experience, you know, non-appropriated fund, I got hired at the Schofield guest house. Then from there, I got back into the cleaning aspects, because I became a housekeeping supervisor and an assistant manager at the guest house. Then when Hale Koa was built, and then they had announced the opening of the Hale Koa Hotel, I thought, Well, you know, I could do it there. It's a four hundred sixty room hotel, and it was gonna be the first military hotel. But of course, I took advantage of the fact that I knew Commander Bennett and

Mrs. Bennett. So, asked them, Could you write me a letter of reference? 'Cause I was a housekeeper for them. And of course, Commander Bennett's name, you know. And then, working at the guest house, I learned military regulations, Army regulations. So, Commander and Mrs. Bennett wrote the letter for me, and then I turned that in with my resume. And then, of course, with the guest house experience as well, and knowing Army regulations—

### **What does Army regulations tell you about housekeeping?**

Actually, the Army regulations had to do with managing. When I went for the interview, I cited AR-230-1, AR-230-2, and it had to do with personnel, how you deal with personnel and management. They were very impressed, because they didn't know the ARs.

So, I got hired to be the first executive housekeeper of the Army hotel. I knew about cleaning, but I didn't know much about chemicals. So, through the magazines, I would read and keep track, and keep articles and everything. And I remember how I had vendors come to me, and these vendors selling chemicals. So, I pulled out some articles from the magazine, and I put it under my glass on my desk. And so, when they tried to sell me the chemicals, I would ask those vendors certain questions. What kind of agents are there, you know. And through that, I learned how to actually become very well versed in the chemical. And then, I got close to some vendors who also taught me, and then I always kept up with the trends and technology of cleaning. You know, reading up about it, working with vendors, learning what's new in the field and everything.

**I think you learned at a very early age just to keep learning, and keep reaching out. Plus, you had confidence, too, that you could do it. And you've cut a career for yourself that I don't know if anybody else has in Hawaii. You've just taken cleaning to another level. And you call it Cleanology.**

Well, actually, I became a member of the International Executive Housekeeping Association. At that time, it was called NEHA, National Executive Housekeepers Association. I became a member in '74. Then I decided to go for certification, and this was at KCC. And after I got my certification, KCC asked me if I would do some training on certification, and I did. And so, with certification, you have to keep up with CEUs, you know, continuing education credits, every three years renew your certification. And I did that; I made sure I stayed on top of it, stayed on top of trends and technology of cleaning. And then, the leadership roles that I took helped me as well with NEHA, IEHA. I ran for the board, the association board.

**The national board?**

The National Board of Housekeeping Association. Got elected in 1980, and this was in New York City. And I thought, Ooh, wow, you know, I'm with all of these people who have college education, and I don't have a college education. But I learned a lot from them, and they learned a lot from me. And they liked it because I was from Hawaii. My first convention was in 1976, then I attended every convention thereafter. I only missed one, and that was in 2014. But then, I ran for office, first vice, second vice, ran for the board a couple of times again. So, I served about sixteen years in leadership role. And then at the chapter level, now we have a chapter, I was president on three different terms.

**And you do have a genuine passion for cleaning.**

Definitely. Cleaning is a science and an art. And people would ask me, What do you mean science? I bring up some questions. Do you know what PH is? Okay; when you buy chemicals, we need to know the different PHs of the chemicals. Now, the other sciences of cleaning is, germ kill. What are the three scientific processes of germ kill? Lot of times when I ask even medical people, they tell me, washing their hands, hot water. Sanitation kills at least fifty percent germs. Disinfecting, ninety percent-plus. Sterilizing, hundred percent. Those are the three scientific processes of germ kill.

**In doing these corporate housekeeping jobs, and then later your private business, you really had to understand people, too.**

Yes.

**It wasn't just the process of cleaning; it was how to use people and manage people.**

When I was in the hotels, I used to do a lot of walking around, and even to the degree where I always used to tell the housekeepers, Your cart should be right parked in front of the room that you're cleaning. Okay; and it's a certain way parked. Your vacuum cleaners, your equipment should be there with you. So, sometimes, I would walk around and I'd see the vacuum cleaner way down the hallway, and the cart. So, I would steal their vacuum cleaners and I'd take it to my office. So, if they saw, Oh, where's my vacuum cleaner? Right way, they'd know, I gotta go see Miss Galera. You know.

**So, you must have scared and intimidated a lot of your employees.**

No, I didn't intimidate them. I think I trained them, and they learned. And then, I would have morning briefings. My morning briefings would not be scoldings, and it would not be what you did wrong, and it would not be complaints. It would be how we can make improvements on things. You know. And 'til today, when I run into some of those; Hey, Miss Galera, I miss your briefings.

You know. Because they remember, you know, some of the things. I think I had good relationships. When I had the Hale Koa Hotel, it was a union property, I never had one union complaint. I believed in working with the people. And when I had the hotels, every morning, I would be in front of my door greeting them coming in, and in the afternoon thanking them going home.

**As a manager, as an executive, how do you get people excited to have a passion like you have for cleaning?**

Well, when I work with the high school students, the approach I take is, I get them to become paranoid.

I show them pictures of what germs would look like.

**Mousey mold; right?**

Yeah. And maybe a picture of a body, you know, a body piece that shows the germ, you know. And I try to encourage them about the profession in that if you're looking for a profession—'cause lot of the students will tell me, Oh, we want to get into a job that pays big bucks. Okay. And I'll tell them about the profession. Yes, I encourage you to go to college to get a degree, because you can demand more in your salary. But if you didn't get a degree, but you went through a certification program, you still can be well paid. I try to talk to the students or even people when I do my training about how beneficial the profession of cleaning is. Because it's very diverse. Not only hotels, there's hospitals, today there's a lot of retirement communities, there's schools, there's colleges. I mean, every building needs to be cleaned, and you need to know about the building environment. So, there will always be a job. And even your retail outlets, the Macy's and all. At one time, I saw an ad where they were looking for a housekeeping manager. You know. Because they need somebody to make sure they know that the people are cleaning.

**You actually still clean as a service in selective cases. Where do you personally clean?**

For this family, and they have a business, and I do their office as well. I've been doing, I think, her home for about a good maybe fifty years. And I know she likes me, because she knows that I'm gonna do a good job. You know, I put my whole heart into it.

**And this is a large executive home, I take it.**

Yeah; I consider it to be a large executive home.

**And you do it by yourself?**

I do it by myself. I do backpack vacuuming. I also do what is called the Easy Trap dusting. I do the microfiber flat mop systems, and the microfiber cleaning technology. Microfiber cloths, microfiber flat mop, vacuuming. And there's this one tool which is a disposable type; it's called Easy Trap. And I use it with the flat mop. And because there's a dog, there's a pet in the house, it picks up everything. Picks up all the hair, pick up everything. And on top of that, I also change the beds, do it hotel style, and wash the linens and everything, and fold it.

**I know you're not self-conscious about your age, so I really feel like I should point out at this point that you're approaching eighty.**

Yes.

**And you're cleaning this large home and business, even though you don't have to.**

No.

**You're an executive.**

Well, actually, you know, I get social security, but I want to supplement my income as well. And yeah, yeah, I can still do it. It helps me keep fit. It's my way of exercising as well. And staying on top of what's happening with the industry as well; I'm still a member of the association. In 2015, I got over being the chapter president, so I'm also doing some consulting and training. I'm going to be working with McKinley Community School. Right now, I'm doing some training there. One Friday, I have a workshop there called Cleanology 101, that has to do with communicable diseases and infection prevention in non-health facilities; schools, hotels, retirement communities. And I go into the process of telling them about epidemiology, what communicable diseases are, what are the different kinds of communicable diseases, infection preventions that they can use in their facilities, about outbreaks, should there be an outbreak. And come up with programs, techniques. I've come up with something called Best Practices. What are the best practices you can use in homes, hotels. And you know what? It's not complicating.

**Mahalo to Rose Galera of Ewa, in West Oahu, for sharing your life story with us, and for your lifelong passion for cleaning. And thanks to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, hui hou.**

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**Do you ever get tired of the whole cleanology business?**

No.

**Never?**

No. I would like to see our profession be raised by people doing it scientifically, with knowledge as well, and our custodians and our janitors and all, are all trained so that we can cut back on infection, you know, controls, or cut back on infection spreading. And also, have people do the jobs right.

**You are a one-woman crusade for cleaning.**

I am; very much so.

[END]