

# LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



**TITLE: HEATHER HAUNANI GIUGNI**

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When we were in Virginia ... as a family, there were these men that were in a truck, and they reached over and spit at us. That was a really—I didn't know at the time what they were doing. I thought it was such an odd thing. But you know, years later, I thought about that.

**Did your family talk about it right after that?**

You know, my parents just totally had to ignore it and move on. But it completely was related to the fact that my father was one color, and my mother was another, and we were in the State of Virginia, right across the Potomac.

*Her early life was split between two worlds...the multi-cultural world of the Hawaiian islands, and the racially-divided world of Washington DC in the 1960s. She saw the power of government and politics firsthand, and also saw the power of traditional stories of Hawaii. Heather Haunani Giugni...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. Heather Haunani Giugni has a reputation in Hawaii as being a behind-the-scenes starter of great ideas...ideas like a television news segment delivered in the Hawaiian language...or an archive to preserve the moving images that visually tell Hawaii's history. Her father, Henry Giugni, was a long-time aide to the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye, and former Sergeant at Arms of the United States Senate. You may have seen some of the programs and documentaries that Heather has produced...shows that tell the stories of Hawaii and our diverse cultures. This "starter" began her life in Pearl City in central Oahu.*

**You're hapa. Your family has mixed blood. You've got Hawaiian on both sides; right?**

M-hm.

**Tell me about your family.**

My family; my mother was Muriel Roselani Giugni. Her name was Austin, and she was brought up on the Pearl City Peninsula, as was my father, whose name was Henry Kuualoha Giugni. And his father came from Napa Valley. He came across when he read a little classified ad in the San Francisco Chronicle that they were building Pearl Harbor. So, he jumped on a ship and came over, and met my pure Hawaiian grandmother, and ... they had two sons. And one of them was my father.

**Many people who are hapa, especially in earlier years, talk about being conflicted—who are they really, which side should they pull, and people react to them differently, based on the ... the mores of their particular culture. Did you go through any of that soul-searching about, Who am I, what side do I pull?**

My parents—you know, I lived in a fabulous household where I don't think we were really given—I know we weren't given a blue ribbon or a pink ribbon, or we weren't given a color ribbon. You know, we just lived in a community that shared food, and and joy. And and there was no issues about ... what ethnic group we were from. Having said that, it was clear in my family's history on my mother's side that they married out early from the 1880s, Europeans. So, the color faded quite rapidly in that generation. My mother had blue eyes, blond hair growing up. My father, on the other hand, was half-Hawaiian and half-Italian. So, I was brought up in a very multiethnic neighborhood, considered hapa. I was brought up during the 50s and 60s in a time when there was a lot of change going on, but I think hapa wasn't a bad word; it was what I was.

**That followed on the heels of those times when so many Hawaiians wanted to be Western. They felt like, We've got to do away with our language, it's time to join the US. The US and the American Way.**

Well, I don't think my father could deny the fact that he has brown skin and Hawaiian features. And I think he was very proud of being Hawaiian. But my grandmother, who I never knew, she uh, passed away before I was born, was a very strong woman, from what I understood. She was a principal at Pearl City Elementary, among the many Hawaiian women that were principals during those years. I think that she wanted the best for her son, and she ... chose for him to learn the new culture.

**Well, what about you? Part-Hawaiian from Pearl City, a very Japanese American neighborhood, going to Kamehameha Schools. What was that like for you?**

I loved Kamehameha Schools. I always aspired to wanting to attend that school. It was just one of the schools that I thought had the coolest kids at the time, when I was younger. I just loved the Big K.

**A lot of people were surprised that you attended Kamehameha Schools. Because ... light skin.**

Well, I don't know. I mean, I never thought about that . . .  
**Did you get teased at the time?**

Oh, you're brave—you are ruthless. No, uh, yeah, okay, I got a little bit teased. But you know, it's part of high school. Truly, I had the best time. The best time. I count myself extremely lucky and extremely fortunate. And I was a boarder, which meant that I had an opportunity to know people from the neighbor islands during a time when their parents still worked at the sugarcane mills or the pineapple fields. Lanai was one of my favorite, favorite islands. When I first met Lanai in—I think I was sixteen or seventeen ... I fell in love with that island.

**What family brought you in?**

The Richardsons. Oh, Mina Morita; Hermina Morita.

**M-hm.**

She was a classmate, and invited me over and her family adopted me there. And it was truly a magical time; magical. They still lived in their original cowboy little plantation homes up at Koele Ranch, with horses surrounding the place, the smell of kerosene lamps and um, pancakes in the morning, and going riding into the fields. It was just ... a really fantastic time.

***Heather Haunani Giugni's comfortable life at the Kamehameha Schools and in Hawaii would soon be reshaped. Her father, after a number of law enforcement positions, found his calling as an aide-de-campe to the man who would become one of America's most influential lawmakers. This job, which would turn into a life-long allegiance, took the Giugni family, including Heather and her three sisters, to the seat of power of the United States of America.***

My father, who was first a policeman, and then a liquor inspector, gravitated toward politics. And met Inouye, Dan Inouye, was impressed with him, and decided to follow him on his journey in life. And that's when we ended up in Washington, DC in 1962.

**What did he do in Senator Inouye's office?**

Oh, he did—you know, he started off as a young man as the Senator's driver, secretary, assistant, go-to boy. You know, everything. You know, he started off doing whatever the Senator needed to win. And was extremely supportive and loyal, I think... he just really believed in the man, and just hooked his little caboose up to, you know, the

Senator's ... journey, and followed him to Washington, DC, where he continued as an assistant, continued always as a driver until my dad became too sick. You know, I think when they actually first arrived in Washington, DC, my parents were around thirty-six years of age. I think that my mother never imagined a longer stay than six years, and they both passed away there in their eighties. So, that's a pretty long run. And my father remained his driver until he couldn't drive the Senator anymore. But he also went up the ranks as Chief of Staff and administrative assistant, and then eventually became Sergeant at Arms.

**Now, how does a half-Hawaiian, dark-skinned man like your dad, where did he go?**

You know, I think he navigated his way fairly well in that situation. He was well-liked on Capitol Hill.

**He was a larger-than-life personality—**

Yeah.

**--wasn't he?**

Yeah, he was. He was— definitely, he had friends that...in the garage basement that would only wash the senators' cars, his car would always get washed first. And yet, he had friends in high places. He was close to many senators that he respected greatly, from both sides of the aisle.

**And when anyone describes your father, they talk about... I think the first descriptive they use is, loyal. And I would have to say, looking at his record, that he was loyal to a fault. Because he did get in trouble for accepting campaign contributions from people that he probably shouldn't have accepted them from.**

Well, you know, that was just post-Watergate. You know, when they changed the rules. And I guess my father did not get that rule change. The memo on that. You know, it's hard to change habits. I think that—you're talking about the Gulf Oil ...

**I'm talking about just—several incidents of—one was with ...**

Yeah.

**--Steinbrenner.**

Yeah; that was that five thousand dol—yeah, yeah. That was just a matter of, I wouldn't say miscommunication; it was just not um, um ... being able to remember to hand the receipts in, and keep the receipts, and that kind of thing.

**But he took responsibility for it, and—**

**And people said, you know, he would do anything for Senator Inouye.**

Well, he believed in the man.

**Mm.**

So, that's a good thing.

**M-hm.**

And he believed in the Senator doing good things. How many people can say that they were with a person from their late twenties until, you know, eighty? That's a pretty remarkable ... length of time to be with somebody, and continually believe in the person.

***In 1962, life in Washington DC was quite different from what it is today. The Civil Rights Amendment, which bans discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, wouldn't be passed for another two years. The first black President was still 46 years in the future. For a mixed-race family, accustomed to the loving arms of Hawaii, the nation's capitol could sometimes be an uninviting place. And for a young girl from Hawaii, the dichotomy between Hawaii and Washington DC could be disconcerting.***

**So, let's talk about experiences on both sides of the big pond.**

Yeah. So, we went up to ... we followed the Senator to DC in '62. My father had gone up first to look for a place to live. It was not as easy, because he was still a man of color, and while my mother was part-Hawaiian, she was a very light-skinned Hawaiian, so she was considered Haole visually. And when we arrived up there, my dad had already secured a house in Maryland. It was in a Catholic neighborhood, and I remember that specifically because ... everyone there was Catholic. It was such an interesting division. You know, there were so many different divisions; by color, but also by religions.

**Was there a color prohibition—**

Well, it was—

**--in your neighborhood? That was the law, right? Um—**

No, there was no . . . we were in Maryland, so my parents looked—you know, my father looked in Virginia, but he realized that there's a law that you cannot live in Virginia if you are mixed race.

**Isn't that amazing that in your lifetime, you were a little kid then, that that law was present?**

Yeah; I know. Well, also, the Civil Rights Act hadn't been written, so there were toilets for Black people, and toilets for White people.

I did have another experience when I was child at this Catholic school. And I'll never forget this, because . . . we were—the nuns were preparing us for the first two Black children to enter our school. And they had us in the auditorium, and told us, you know, to act normal or whatever they were doing. And meanwhile, I was thinking, Who is coming from Mars? You know. I mean, it was like one of these situations.

**Because it was not a big deal to you if somebody was of another—**

No, I didn't—

**--race was coming**

No, I didn't understand the way they were prepping and—uh, uh, for us . . . who these two children were, you know, that we were—that we were supposed to be acting normal about. And so, these two children showed up, and I looked at them, and they looked just like my father. And I called my mom up and said . . . I don't want Daddy to pick me up today.

'Cause clearly, you know, it was a very racist community and it was shocking to see . . . to go to a place where there was—that parents taught their children to hate.

**M-hm.**

**Especially when you're making trips back and forth to Hawaii, and there was not this kind of . . .**

No.

**--racial charged . . .**

No; there—

--action.

M-hm. And my parents were very committed to making sure that if we were going to school on the East Coast, at every vacation, we would all be sent back to Hawaii. And vice versa. So, my parents made a huge commitment to keeping us connected to Hawaii. So, we never felt, ever, disconnected from our home in Hawaii.

***Growing up in Washington DC gave Heather Haunani Giugni the opportunity to witness historic events in the 60s that changed our nation. She marched to protest the use of nuclear weapons, and to support gay rights and abortion. At age 18, she was a young delegate to the 1972 Democratic National Convention. These causes and events shaped her sense of responsibility to make the world a better place. Her Hawaiian roots gave her a direction in which to focus her advocacy.***

I was living in DC at the time of the Watergate hearings, and I snuck into the hearings all the time. It was pretty amazing, to be part of that event. I also was affected by a lot of things that needed change. So, I spent a lot of my time on the National Mall protesting, while the Senator and my father were behind the Italian marble watching, watching these protests. So, I had uh, a few um, uh ... uh, disagreements with my father over dinner... but you know, I loved him and he really was my hero in so many ways, and one of the things I'm proudest of him, of many things, is the fact that he marched in Selma, Alabama with Martin Luther King in those years. So, that was pretty phenomenal.

***In 1981, after earning a degree in journalism from the University of Maryland, Heather Haunani Giugni came home to Hawaii. She worked for awhile at KGMB News, which, at the time, was by far the number one news station in Hawaii...a great opportunity for a budding journalist. But a career in news was not quite what Giugni saw for her future.***

You worked at Bob Sevey's old newsroom.

Bob Sevey's with you, at KGMB News.

Yeah.

One of the good things.

**And yet, you didn't stay in news. I mean, that was sort of the piko of the time, because of the ... all of the opportunity to do good and to do well.**

You know, I came back from DC, 'cause I wanted to . . . I came back 'cause of my grandmother. I wanted to be with my family before ... people passed away. And the news was a great job, but I really cared about my community, and I really cared

particularly about my Hawaiian community, and had the opportunity to create programming for and about Hawaiians.

***Heather Haunani Giugni was on a mission. She launched "Enduring Pride," a magazine program by and for native Hawaiians. She co-produced the documentary, "One Voice," bringing the story of the Kamehameha Schools Song Contest to the national public television audience. At the time of our conversation, in summer of 2016, she had produced 10 live broadcasts of the famed Song Contest. Giugni was instrumental in the inclusion of Hawaiian language segments in local television newscasts. Then Governor Abercrombie appointed her to the Hawaii State House of Representatives in 2012. And with Hollywood producer Chris Lee, she is a driving force behind Uluulu: The Henry Kuualoha Giugni Moving Image Archive of Hawai'i.***

And presently, the Moving Image Archive is something that I'm extremely proud of—

**Which you are cofounder of.**

Yeah; I'm one of the founders. But, you know, there's so many founders of that archive. You know that archive was an idea that came around thirty years ago, maybe more, of different librarians and archivists that wanted to save our moving image. The whole idea is to create it so that it's available for public access, or otherwise, poho if it's stuck in a can, or you know, in a case, and nobody can ever see it. I mean...we've lost a lot ... over the last forty years, but we've still gained a lot.

**A lot of what?**

Films and videos have disintegrated or been lost, or people have thrown them away.

**I remember your coming to give a talk to a group I'm part of, and you just fired everybody in that room up, because you talked about the daily disintegration of film and videos, and family documentation that's, you know, moldering under beds somewhere and in closets. And you had everybody just ready to go home and look under the bed, and into their closets.**

Some people have. Some people have. We've gotten fabulous material. I mean ... this is the best deal in the century. You give the archive your precious material, you still get to own the copyright of it. The archive finds the grant to have it transferred to multiple formats, then preserves it and servers not just here on island, but on the mainland, in the salt mine as well as in another facility, so it's backup. And so, you have this historical preservation of an entire community.

**What are the most amazing things you have seen ... coming to you in this media archive? I know you have just ... cans and cans of film, and all kinds of tapes of different vintages.**

Okay; so every collection is my favorite collection. So we have just received your collection at PBS, so it's pretty fantastic. So, thank you very much. It's all about the future. Future curriculum, future education. And we have collections from Eddie and Myrna Kamae, as well as the Don Ho collection. Just received the KITV collection. We have all KGMB's collection was the anchor.

*Hello, I would have run for this if I knew what you got. You got all this office space...*

But Senator Inouye's collection ... because of obviously my personal interest, is pretty fantastic. I see my father in his late twenties or early thirties, driving Miss Daisy around. Which is the Senator and his wife.

*I've been a fireman...a policeman...a liquor inspector...I started out as a messenger with Senator Inouye. A secretary...a driver...and he gave me an opportunity to get ahead. To study, and to learn...*

And it's fantastic, because it's footage that, you know, that hasn't been seen since 1958, 59. It's just fabulous stuff of Nanakuli, and electioneering. And that's what's so fabulous about this footage, is that it's not just about seeing people's families, but it's about seeing what they're wearing, what they're eating, what the landscape looks like. I'm very into kakou. And I just really am a believer in that. And this archive is about our community.

***In 2013, Heather Giugni started one of her more ambitious projects. She gathered a 100% local production crew, added local chef and restaurateur Ed Kenney, and proceeded to tell the stories of dishes that our local heritage is based upon. At the intersection of food, family, culture and history is "Family Ingredients."***

*[Video footage of "Family Ingredients"]*

*"Here we go . . . poisson cru."*

*"Mmmmm . . . ." [laughter]*

*"I don't have to fake it. It's soooo good."*

**Family Ingredients. I mean, this is an amazing, what we think here will be a phenomenon because of the combination of culture, genealogy, all kinds of history, food.**

Yeah. Everything is an extension of ... my belief system, and what I care about, my core, which is my community, my Hawaiian community, Hawaii. And everything starts there, and everything that I've done is related to that mission. And so, this is just part and parcel of that. In Family Ingredients, I just use food as chum to tell the story.

**It's not a food show, per se.**

No, not at all. You know, we come from all different places, and so, it reconnects us to family and histories that we've either forgotten or never known, or—are reconnecting with.

**And a lot of times, you know, we know the foods people bring to potlucks, but we don't know the histories behind them.**

M-hm.

**And they're so elemental and you know that they came from another country, but they're as close to you as anything could be.**

It's the plantation story, you know, when all the workers came together and they'd all have their ethnic foods, and then they'd just all throw it into one pot. I mean, it was the invention of saimin; right?

**And it's very hard to get a show on a national network. And PBS is an especially demanding provider. So, you went and you presented this, and actually have a national series on the PBS network.**

You know, I actually wanted this to be part of the PBS family. I wanted it to be part of your family here at PBS Hawaii, because it helps all of us. And then, and of course, on the national scene, I wanted it to be a calling card to everyone around the globe about who we are and what we profess.

*At the time of this conversation in summer of 2016, Family Ingredients was set to premiere on PBS stations across the nation. Heather Haunani Giugni, who as a girl was exposed to racial discrimination and to multi-cultural harmony, set a table for all races, cultures and people. Family Ingredients is the stew of Heather's life experiences in Washington DC and Hawaii, seasoned with her love for Hawaiian culture, and served in a bowl of her passion as a filmmaker. Mahalo to Heather Haunani Giugni of Aiea, for sharing your story with us. And thank you, for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, a hui hou.*

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I would tell young filmmakers to become a dentist. Get that house, and then use those extra funds to build and create anything you want. I just—it's a hard, hard road.

**And do you love it?**

I love it. I love it because it's about my community, and that's what I care about.