

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



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When my mother was carrying me, before I was born, she slipped and fell, and the doctors had said that I wasn't gonna make it. And a few days later, my mother went back to the hospital; the doctor said, unbelievable, it's a miracle, he hadn't seen it in all of his years; I made a complete recovery. And my mother would always tell me that story, and I always felt that I kind of owed God something. Like if I have these talents and I have this desire to want to help, that I should do my best to make the most of the talents that He has given me.

In the 1980s, Glenn Medeiros became an international pop star, with chart-topping hits like “Nothing’s Gonna Change My Love For You”. These days, a different kind of spotlight shines on Glenn Medeiros as he leads Honolulu’s St. Louis School as its president. Glenn Medeiros, 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. Long before there was the TV show American Idol, Hawaii had its own big breakout pop star. If you tuned in to any Top 40 radio station during the 80s and early 90s, you’d hear Glenn Medeiros and his hit songs like “Nothing’s Gonna Change My Love For You” and “She Ain’t Worth It”. In 1987, Glenn Medeiros, just sixteen years old at the time, shot to international fame after winning Brown Bags to Stardom, a Hawaii-based singing competition. How did this soft-spoken boy from the Garden Island become a global singing sensation?

Well, I was born in Lihue on Kauai. I grew up in the small town of Lawai. And grew up with one brother, two sisters in Lawai, and very humble beginnings; we had very little in terms of materials and money, but we had lots of love. Lots of love; two great parents. My dad was a tour guide, a former Marine, fought in the Korean War. And my mother stayed at home; she did a great job of taking care of all of and being there for us, which really made a huge impact on every one of us. And I grew up having just a wonderful experience on Kauai, like living in the country, really, just fishing, going to the beach, playing sports, going to church. Very simple life, but a very, very enjoyable one.

Did you ever get bored?

Yes, I did.

[CHUCKLE]

I did. But it was good, because I think it helped me to cultivate my imagination. I would spend a lot of time just thinking about things; thinking about, What do you want do with your life, are you gonna leave Kauai, are you gonna stay here? What do I want to do? And I think it helped me later on in life.

To have that time to reflect?

Yeah; yeah.

Well, what did you decide you wanted to do when you were that little kid on Kauai thinking about it?

Well, I love music, and I sang and listened to music all day. But I knew that the chances of me leaving Kauai and ever doing something with it would be very slim. And so, I was looking at other things. And I've always wanted to be in a position where I could help people, so I thought about fireman, police officer. But then, when I was in about the third, fourth grade, I was in class, and I met a teacher who really made a huge difference in my life, and helped me to believe in myself. And once he was able to do that, it kind of spread out into a lot of different things. I found myself getting involved in student government, and doing a lot of different things. And I said, Hey, I want to be like that person, like I want to make a difference.

What do you think he saw in you?

What he did is what I take pride in as an educator, is being able to find whatever that person's talent is, bring it out there, and let the person know, Hey, you've got something special and you need to do something with this. I was very quiet in school, and he was our music teacher. He heard me singing in the corner there, and he said, Hey, can you come over here a little bit? Can you sing for me? And I remember when I first started singing, he was just in complete shock. He didn't realize that this kid who would never say a word all of a sudden started singing. But he was more than that. He provided me my first piano, first guitar. That particular teacher, his name is Arnold Meister, and he's a wonderful person on Kauai, and does a lot of work on Kauai, and he continues to nurture so many talented people there. And then in high school, I had a teacher named Larry McIntosh, who was a fantastic band teacher. And he also just helped me to build my confidence. And he would use every opportunity he could to have me perform with the band and sing. And again, it's all about building confidence in people to believe in themselves.

Growing up on Kauai, Glenn Medeiros would continue to develop his singing talent. He'd perform in school, church, and even on his father's tour bus. And at age sixteen, he would perform a song that would propel him to stardom, far beyond his island home.

Did everyone know on Kauai that you were a really good singer, and you performed a lot in different places? You were a known commodity as a teenager for your singing on Kauai; right?

You know, I think Kauai is a small community, and you always have those contests going on. And so, you see kids, and for about a good three, four-year span, you'll see a kid that's all over the place. I don't think most people thought that me being everywhere singing would eventually lead to, you know, a top-ten hit in the United States.

How did it happen? You were competing in Brown Bags to Stardom.

M-hm.

From your high school.

M-hm. Yeah; I entered a talent contest at the age of sixteen, Brown Bags to Stardom. Actually, no; I entered at fifteen years old, in my freshman year. And I won the island championship, came to Oahu, and I did not place in the top three. So, second year, came back, won the Island of Kauai, came back, and then won the state championship. And then, the winner was entitled at the time to go into the recording studio, record a song, and I recorded the song that I sang at the contest.

Nothing's gonna change my love for you. You ought to know by now how much I love you. One thing you can be sure of, I'll never ask for more than your love. Nothing's gonna change my love for you ...

When you chose to sing George Benson's song at Brown Bags to Stardom, what made you choose that song?

Well, I didn't choose the song. I chose the song for the contest because I loved it, and I love George Benson. But when it was time for the winner of the contest to record a song, those at KIKI Radio at the time said, Glenn, we need to record this. At the time, Whitney Houston had recorded a George Benson song called "Greatest Love of All" and made it into a big hit. So, they said, Oh, I think you can do the same thing with "Nothing's Gonna Change My Love for You". And George Benson, in my opinion, is probably my favorite artist. One of my favorite artists, for sure, one of the top five. But he was also known as a jazz artist, so a lot of radio stations, I don't think, played his stuff, thinking that he was more of a jazz artist. I like his version much better than mine, but

basically, I was talked into recording the song, and luckily for me they did, because it's a really great song. And I feel like almost anyone could sing the song, and it'd be successful. It's just a wonderful positive love story.

And it was on the Billboard top one hundred songs.

Yeah; it was a top-ten song; it went up to number eight. And it probably would have been number one if it had been released on a major recording label all at the same time. What ended up happening is, it was on a small record label, released on the West Coast first, and then on the East Coast. And so, it never had that full punch. But in the other countries that it was released in, it went to number one in almost every country.

How many countries did it go to number one in?

Mm ... it's gotta be at least twenty.

Wow!

Yeah.

So, what happened to your life at age—this is sixteen now, that you won the contest?

Yes. It was interesting, because I never wanted to leave Kauai. And so, when I look back now, I think to myself that maybe, if I had wanted my career to move on and reach the highest heights possible, I would have moved. But I never wanted to leave Kauai. I'm a real family man, and I wanted to be around my friends, and I didn't want to leave Kauai. And so, I would go to places for a couple months at a time, and I started traveling, and it was wonderful. And in about five years, I had gone through two passports and about forty countries.

Were you traveling alone as a teenager? Did you have a chaperone? How does that work?

At first, I traveled with my dad; he would come with me. And then, after about the first year, then I started traveling on my own. And sometimes, my manager from New York would come with me. But no, I had to learn to grow up real quickly, and it was a very good experience for me.

Did you get a little bit too much of the adult nightlife in the beginning?

You almost get thrown in; right?

Right. You know, for me, I would say that my mother, you know, all of her messages she gave me growing up just had all stayed with me the whole time. I was not one to go to clubs, and to enjoy the nightlife. I would go, and I'd perform at clubs, and then I'd leave and I'd do my thing. I didn't enjoy being on the road; I didn't like it. I enjoyed visiting museums and visiting historical places, and I loved the people that I would meet along the way. But the life of a singer was just very ... it's not a good life. It's a lot of highs, a lot of lows. And in the back of my mind, I always knew that at some point, I would settle down and try to find myself something a little more stable.

You did it for five years.

Well, very busy for about five years. But all together, it was from about sixteen through twenty-four, so about eight years altogether.

Now, tell me; you gotta tell me the truth, okay?

Did you have groupies?

Oh, yeah. Yeah; there were, there were.

They followed you around, came to your hotel room door, that kinda stuff?

Yeah; yeah. Those kind of people always kinda scared me, actually, to be honest. Because they weren't really interested in me; they were interested in, you know, the singer. And I kinda shied away from that.

During the 80s and 90s, Glenn Medeiros achieved more popularity in Europe than in America. While "Nothing's Gonna Change My Love For You" climbed as high as Number 12 on the American Billboard Hot 100, listeners in the U.K. took the song to Number 1 in their country for four weeks. In 1989, Glenn Medeiros recorded the song "Un Roman d'Amitie" with Elsa Lunghini, and it went to Number 1 in France. And then, in 1990 came a collaboration that would bring Glenn Medeiros a Number 1 on the U.S. charts.

I did have some other hits; in 1990, a number one song in the United States with Bobby Brown that I did.

How did that happen?

I was working on my third album at MCA Records. And up until that point, I had been singing a lot of love songs, which is what I love doing. But the record company had come up to me and they said, Hey, Bobby is on the same label as you are, he's on a little bit of a break, and we want you both to sing together. And we were

conceptualizing what the new record would be like, and I had told them that I wanted to continue on the same path of singing love songs. And they had told me at the time there was a real shift towards grunge and hip-hop, and they said, You know, Glenn, if you want to continue in that direction, we can't continue working with you. And that was a tough thing for me, because at the time, I had just bought a house on Kauai, and I wasn't in the situation where I could really dictate what I wanted.

How old were you when you bought the house?

I think I was eighteen; seventeen, eighteen. Yeah.

But then, you had a mortgage to pay.

Yes; yes. And wasn't in the position to be able to call the shots, per se. So, I kinda caved in. I said, Okay, I'll do some hip-hop, even though I can't dance. I love listening to the music, but I'll do it. And so, we recorded an album of hip-hop music, and I eventually did meet Bobby, who I was a big fan of, and he recorded that song with me, and a couple other songs.

It was "She Ain't Worth It"?

Yes, yes.

Grammatical.

I know. I didn't write it, though, so it's okay.

And did you strike up a lasting relationship with Bobby Brown, whose life did become somewhat of a train wreck?

Yeah. I mean, I did create a relationship with him, but I could kinda see where things were going. And so, I kind of kept a distance a little bit. You know, Bobby, it's unfortunate, but in general, you see what drugs does to people, And it destroys lives. And if someone were to meet Bobby, he's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. But unfortunately, when those same people are doing drugs, they turn completely different. And I was able to see a lot of people, lot of artists who were on drugs, and then not on drugs; and just completely different people.

At age twenty-four, Glenn Medeiros came to a crossroads in his life. He could either continue to press his career as a musical artist, or pursue another childhood dream: becoming a schoolteacher.

There came a time in 1994 where I looked at things, and I said, Okay, I'm twenty-four years old. Do I move to LA and give it a real try, or do I start going to college and become a teacher? Which is what I wanted to be. And I thought long and hard about it, and then I got a call from Frank DeLima. And so, Frank says, Glenn, Loyal Garner's looking for somebody to perform with her. Would you mind coming up and performing with her and doing a show with her? And I said, Okay, well, let me talk to her. And Loyal and I hit it off; she was amazing. And next thing you know, I said, You know what? This is for me a sign from God that I can perform at night, about five nights a week, and go to school during the day. And it was wonderful. And I made my decision at that point that I would move to teaching. And there were a lot of people that were disappointed. My managers and so forth, they said, You know, you're only twenty-four years old. But I really didn't enjoy the life of a performer.

You have to tour; right?

Yeah. Being on stage is wonderful, but just being on tour, going to one city a day, not knowing most of the people around you, how it's very taxing, how money is great but it doesn't come in a constant stream. And putting all of those things together, I knew it was time for me to settle down in Hawaii. I mean, it was hard for me to move, actually, from Kauai to here, because I love Kauai so much. But I moved here and started performing and going to college.

Of course, that was a pretty good job to get you through school, performing as the headliner with Loyal Garner.

She was amazing. She treated me like a son. She would always say, I'm gonna take care of you, Glenn, don't worry about anything. She bought me all of my clothes that I would wear in the show. She'd tell me exactly what to do. Glenn, you know, singing in a stadium is different from singing in a club, you gotta do it this way. And she really taught me what it takes to be a professional singer in that type of environment. So, I learned a lot from her. And we performed together for a little while, and then the opportunity came for Frank DeLima and I to perform together. And so, we did a show for about three years together, and it was so much fun.

So, Frank is another one of those people that made a huge impact in my life.

And he's essentially an educator, too, in what he does with middle school kids.

Oh, yes.

All over the state, or has done.

Yes. I mean, Frank and I are very similar in many ways, because we have the Portuguese background, for one thing, but we both love music, and he loves singing. And um, I was a huge fan of his, growing up. And so, he still helps me to this day; he's a wonderful, wonderful man.

You've also sung at the Hale Koa. I mean, it wasn't a hard stop; right?

Right.

You continued to sing.

Yeah. You know, I always tell people that as funny as it seems, I sold seven million records, but I didn't make a whole lot of money, believe it or not, as a singer. In the recording industry, you make money when you write music, not so much when you sing it. It's the way the laws are set up, and the singers have never really fought for their rights, but writers have. And so, I didn't start writing 'til my early twenties. By that time, things started slowing down in my career. But being able to be in the educational field, I was able to actually, believe it or not, make more money than I did when I sang. Because what I would do is, I'd teach, and I'd have something solid that I could depend on, but I'd perform at night. And so, it's really ironic. I would tell other people, You don't have to give up your life completely to do what you love. You can work in whatever capacity you want during the day, and still perform at night, and live very comfortably.

One's a salary job, and one's a self-employment job.

Yeah.

So, it's two different kinds of taxes, too.

And some people would say it's too much. I mean, I'm a hard worker, I don't mind working during the day and working at night. But you know, just like everyone else in Hawaii, it's not easy. The cost of living is high here, and so it's good to have both at the same time.

While still performing part-time with Frank DeLima at the Polynesian Palace on Oahu, Glenn Medeiros graduated from the University of Hawaii at West Oahu and fulfilled his dream of becoming a teacher.

So, at this point, you're a teacher, and you're on your way to increasingly advanced degrees which would earn you a doctorate eventually.

M-hm.

But a family came along. How did that happen?

Well, I met my wife in 1996, I believe. And she's from here on Oahu, and we immediately hit it off, and were married about a year later. And she's been extremely supportive of me. So, we talk about how it's about timing and it's about the people in your life. But in my life, my wife has been extremely supportive of whatever it is that I wanted to do. For me, my most important job is to be a good father and husband. And so, I have that driving force that pushes me to work really hard so that I can provide them whatever it is that they need. But between my wife and my two kids, I've always had this constant stream of support and of love, and so I feel very blessed. My son is a sophomore at St. Louis School, and so, we drive together every day to work, and we have a great relationship. And my daughter is a freshman at Punahou, and she's wonderful. She likes to sing, and so, she's kinda carving her own path right now. My son plays the bass in a band, and so, it's nice to see how life becomes cyclical at times.

Is your wife musical, too?

No, she's not. But it would be fun, though, because I think we could kinda put a band together.

I tell her, Come on, you want to play the drums or something? But, no; no. She's more the athlete, which is good for my kids, because I'm not one, although I've tried. So my kids like to play sports, and they like to play music.

And your children's names?

So, my son's name is Chord, and my daughter's name is Lyric. And it wasn't my idea; it was my wife. I came up with these very common names, but I'm glad that we chose those names, though, because a lot of people like them.

Glenn Medeiros continued his career as an educator in both public and private schools on Oahu, and in 2014, he earned his doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Southern California.

I remember being in elementary school and seeing these kids who would struggle in school. But outside of the classroom, they were really bright. I mean, they were really smart kids, but in the classroom, really struggling. And I thought, Well, that doesn't make sense here. And I remember just being a kid, thinking about it. Like, wow; now, if I were teaching, how would I do things differently? And I would look at the teacher, and the teachers probably had no idea I was doing that. But I've always been fascinated with what does it take for people to learn. So, when I became a teacher,

for me, it was more than just getting in front of the kids and teaching. It was this challenge of, you know, what will it take for everyone in my classroom to really excel and do well? What will it take on my part? So, a lot of reflection after every day, sitting back thinking, What can I do differently? I gotta look at the research, what do I need to do to help these kids? Because I believe that every person is intelligent in their own way, every person has their own gifts. But maybe they didn't grow up in a household where parents were reading to them every night. Maybe they're in a situation where they have so much emotional baggage that they can't even think about trying to learn how to multiply these fractions. And so, I'm really fascinated by what it takes for people to learn. So, when I became a teacher, it was, Ah, I just love it; I was very passionate about it.

And yet, you decided, I would like to be an administrator.

Most teachers don't say, I'd like to take care of the bureaucracy and the paperwork and the structure. But you saw a way to make a difference, in a different way.

You know, I got to a point where I was teaching, and I felt that I should probably consider administration, because I've been able to teach from K all the way through about twelfth grade, and I've experienced the different levels of teaching.

And different types of schools, too; right?

And different types of schools.

Public, private.

Public and private, Catholic. And I thought to myself, I think I could even make a larger impact by becoming an administrator. And so, I tried out for it at Maryknoll School, and then became a vice principal for about four years, and learned a great deal from them. And so, I've been very blessed. I love being an administrator. It's a lot of work, it's a lot of work, but you're in a position where you can make a lot of difference in people's lives. And I like that.

At the time this conversation was recorded in the Spring of 2016, Glenn Medeiros, PhD was in his first year on the job as the president of St. Louis School, a rare all-boys Catholic school in Hawaii. He's Dr. Medeiros to the student body, and he has not left the stage. He continues to perform twice a week at the Hale Koa Hotel in Waikiki. Mahalo to Glenn Medeiros of Honolulu for sharing your story with us. And thank you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii, and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, hui hou.

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So, did people who met you do double-takes? Hey!

Yeah.

Aren't you Glenn Medeiros?

Yes.

Is that Glenn Medeiros?

When I first started teaching, it was the students and the sisters. Oh, my gosh, I know your records. Then later, it was the parents of the kids that I taught would say, Hey, Glenn, are you still singing? And most people see it as a positive. Most people see it as ...

It's not a distraction to you or them?

It's not a distraction or anything. No, no; not to me, not to me.

[END]