

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



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Does it irk you, though, to be a missionary descendant, and to hear comments about missionaries taking advantage and getting rich?

Getting rich off the Hawaiians. I think a lot of that ... in some ways, I do. But I tend to get it corrected in what they did well, and why they did well at it.

His family arrived in Hawai'i around 1840, after a long journey from New York around Cape Horn. He describes himself as a Caucasian with a Hawaiian cultural background. Growing up, he didn't need toys; just his horses, Nellie and Kamehameha, and the slopes of upcountry Maui. Next, on Long Story Short, Henry Rice.

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawai'i's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

Aloha mai kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Henry Rice is a third generation rancher and former bank executive from Kula, Maui. His family's century-old ranch named Kaonoulu, which means the good or plentiful breadfruit, is one of the few nearly intact ahupuaa left in Hawai'i. The ranchlands span from the top of Haleakala down toward the shores of Kihei. Kaonoulu Ranch, now roughly ten thousand acres in size, has been in operation since the Hawaiian Monarchy. Henry Rice is a direct descendant from a missionary family.

Well, I think it goes back to they came here in about 1840, 1841.

What for?

On my father's side, the Rice side, was William Harrison Rice. And he came here as a missionary. My grandmother's side, which was the Baldwin side, they came here as a doctor. When they first got here, William Harrison was actually to go on down to the South Pacific; the Society Islands. He got ill here, and so, he and his wife stayed here, and consequently, never did get down permanently to the South Pacific.

And where were they from?

East Coast; New York.

And what generation are you on down the line?

Fifth, if I count correctly. Yeah. Because it would have been William Harrison Rice, then William Hyde Rice, then my grandfather Pop, then my father, and then myself. So, we're fifth generation.

And the family business was not being a missionary; that ended with that generation?

Yeah.

How did ranching get into the family blood and property?

Well, I would say, really, Pop Rice.

Was he already a rancher?

No; he grew up on Kauai with his brothers and sisters, and moved to Maui in the sugar business, and also in the fruit growing business in Haiku. And it was there on Maui that he met his bride, Charlotte Baldwin, who was Henry P. Baldwin's daughter. And they got married there on Maui, and lived on Maui. Our ranch is probably one of the last ahupua'as on the island, running from the top of Haleākala Crater down to the beach. Going back further, it was under King Kamehameha IV. It was this huge tract of land from mountain to ocean was given to, or deeded to a Hawaiian. And then, that was about in mid-1800s.

Do you know what Hawaiian family?

It's Kaoahokolo'i. And then, the ranch itself, which is the Kaonoulu Ahupuaa, eventually ended up in farming with a Chinese person by the name of Young Hee. And Young Hee in turn, in the early 1900s, about 1902, sold it to Colonel William Cornwell, who at that time was a sugar grower on Waikapui. Then my grandfather, Pop Rice, purchased it from Colonel William Cornwell's daughter, who was married to John Walker. And he purchased it in 1916 from them.

How much did it cost?

It's always been a wonder. Everybody has wondered about that.

You were around when your grandfather was alive. What was the personalities of the people who headed the ranch and the lands before you did?

He was a very large person, with a very large voice. Very heavily involved in politics, but ranching was his life and his love. But he was never afraid to try something new, and he was always experimenting with a farming operation, a large piggery.

Was he fair?

Very fair, and very well appreciated by our neighbors. I always admired; in different walks of life, people would come up and tell me of things that he did. But he was a very modest man, and he was very much below the radar in that aspect. Very above the radar in politics.

What kind of politics?

State Senate. He was a longtime Republican, but then, I think it was back in the late 30s, he switched to Democrat. He rode his own trail.

So, that's a large legacy. You know, that's your grandfather. What was your father like? Did he also live large?

He was very much under the radar; very much under the radar. And he did not like politics, per se. His integrity and character was something that I always admired. You know, at one time, he was head of the Maui Police Commission. At one time, he was head of the Maui Water Department, which was at that time autonomous to the county government. He was a very influential person in my life.

So, he didn't run for office, but he was appointed to office.

Yes; right.

He was also in public roles, but in an appointed fashion.

That's correct; yeah. But he was a wonderful person.

When you say his integrity always impressed you, do you remember as a little kid feeling like, Wow, my father is really a straight, fair guy?

Absolutely.

Do you remember anything?

Oh, there are just numerous incidents. And that's the beauty of growing up on the ranch, was the ability to work side-by-side with your father every summer as a small

child, growing up to when I went away to college. Then after college, we were weaned.

So, you rode alongside him, and worked alongside him in the office?

There was no office.

No office?

It was always horseback.

The office was out on a horse back.

The office was down in Wailuku, and we didn't go there.

What did the paniolos you worked with teach you about life? Lots of Hawaiian families have grown up on your ranch.

Yeah; yeah. What'd they teach me about life?

Yep.

I think the first thing that comes to my mind is the importance of the 'aina, the land. And that in Hawaii, it is very important to have good stewardship of your lands, that lands in Hawaii should never been taken for granted, and that you're responsible for good stewardship. That, followed with a lot of good fun.

In addition to laborious duties on the family ranch, Henry Rice did make time for fun, and took advantage of the open country on Maui.

I grew up in our family home in Makawao, which is a home above Makawao. The ranch had a few hundred acres in Makawao there, so it was where the horses were all kept. And in our yard, I had two horses, Nellie and Kamehameha, that I rode all the time. It was mostly outdoors you made your own fun.

So, you raced; did you play polo?

I played a lot of polo. A hard, but a very fun sport. I was very, very lucky in that my years in polo, I got to play for the Maui Polo Team. Probably the last Maui polo team to play outdoor polo at Kapi'olani Park.

Yeah; so you came before the days of people staying inside with their digital devices and watching Netflix on their Smart TVs.

Right.

Always outdoors; nighttime too, campfires?

I think our best camping trips were during the summers, where we would get on our horses with my mother and father, and family, and packhorses and ride a whole day around the Island of Maui to an area called Waipai, and spend about five days over there, hunting goats and fishing. That was a lot of fun. And then, ride all the way back.

As a teenager, Henry Rice traded in his daily life of horseback riding in open spaces for city life on Oahu.

Afterwards, then came down to Honolulu to go to school here.

Did you board?

At Punahou. Yes; we boarded. And then, on to Fort Collins, Colorado at Colorado State University.

Why did you go to Colorado State?

Well, number one, I had a very good scholarship to go there. Secondly, I knew some people from Hawai'i that were already going to Colorado. And I knew they had a good ag school, and I was gonna major in animal husbandry. And so, the combination, 'cause I had never been off to the mainland before, knowing that some people that were already going there was a big influence. There was a Hawaiian gal, and her name escapes me right now, that was going to Colorado State University. She came from the Big Island. And she was a friend of Sandy's. She's the one that said to me; she said, You ought to meet this lady, Sandy Goodfellow.

Did you know when you saw her, she would be your wife?

Very shortly after I met her, I knew. She was a very beautiful person, Sandy was, and still is.

It sounds like you intended to take over the family ranch after college.

No; no, no.

Even though you were majoring in animal husbandry? Which you already knew a lot about.

I think very early on, growing up on the ranch, and especially as we got into college and came back during the summers, it became very important in my father's eyes, and I really thank him for this, that we get weaned and go out and find out own way, and gain some experience at other ranches. So, when you graduate, find a job.

M-hm.

But get it on another ranch.

But it was gonna be ranching?

It was gonna be ranching. And I started out at Moloka'i Ranch. By then, I had gotten married to Sandy, the wife I have today. So, we moved in 1960 to Moloka'i, where I was employed by Moloka'i Ranch. And we were five years on Moloka'i. They were wonderful years. God, this wonderful place. It still is a wonderful place. And I had always been interested in what made certain businesses successful, and what made the same type of business unsuccessful. When I made the change to go to Bank of Hawai'i, a lot of that played a role in why would I leave ranching to go into banking. Primarily, at that time, Moloka'i Ranch was negotiating with Louisiana Land Company to develop the west end of Moloka'i. And so, the chairman of the board of the ranch was also the chairman of the board of Bank of Hawai'i, and he thought it would be very good for me to go down and learn a little bit of land development and land financing, and get my feet wet there. So he, together with another person, Wilson Cannon, talked me into going down to the bank. So, Sandy and I picked up our two children who were born on Moloka'i, and came down to Honolulu.

What did you start off as at the bank?

In the vault, counting currency, I think it was. Then I got moved up in the training session to a teller. But I could never balance.

So, they got me out of there fast.

So, you started kind of at the bottom?

At the bottom. It was fun. It was hard work in that I had to really grind myself into a lot of areas that I'd not touched before. Especially accounting and business financing, and credit. So, I did a lot of night schools.

You had connections, two generations, yourself and your daughter, with the family of Barack Obama.

My daughter uh, graduated with President Obama. They were in the same class together. My connection was, I worked for his grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, in part of going through the various parts of the Bank of Hawai'i. In fact, I think I still have a couple of scars on my back from her.

She was known as a very strong woman.

She was an immense banker.

How did she leave those scars on your back?

Just because a of my stupidity of not doing things right.

But she was a marvelous person; marvelous person.

And then, you rose to become an executive in Honolulu.

I first became in charge of the corporate banking division, then did that for about five or six years. And then, moved over and became head of all retail banking units, domestically and internationally. And it was a lot of fun. What made it a lot of fun was, I was with good people all the time.

While ranching was profitable for Henry Rice's grandfather in the early 20th century, by the 1950s, when Henry's father Harold "Oskie" Rice and uncle Garfield King bought the ranch, it was a break even business. As time marched on, and as Henry Rice and the third generation came of age, the family was faced with tough decisions. They sold their coastal lands in Kihei to survive in the family business.

It was about '81, '82, early 80s, that we formed the family partnership. Then unfortunately, my father passed away in '83, I think it was. And unexpectedly, my uncle passed away uh, in '87. So, my cousin Charley King came on as a general partner, and my Aunt Mary came in as a general partner, and I was the managing general partner. But I was still at the bank, still enjoying my banking days there. But, I kid everyone. Finally, my Aunt Mary said that I'd been playing around long enough, and I had to come home and work.

I came home. The Pi'ilani Highway down in South Kihei was being built, and it was gonna be cutting off a portion of our makai ranchlands. We got ourselves together, and said, You know, those lands are gonna become valuable. It was at that time that we made the decision, Okay, let's entitle the lands below the Pi'ilani Highway.

You sold the coastal lands.

Coastal lands; all the coastal lands. But we put it into other properties, which in turn then produce income. So that you would not wake up one day and say, Where'd all our assets go? We have three warehouses in Austin, three in Ontario, California, and a few others. Since then, the younger generation has brought on a commercial fence company that's doing very well.

I presume your banking background, you were a banker for twenty-five years. That must have informed what happened to how you could support this wonderful land, where renting couldn't do it.

Without it, I wouldn't have been able to bring the ranch to its financial stability that it is now.

As the patriarch of the Rice family, Henry continues to honor the traditions of his family's past, and values the importance of staying connected with his extended 'ohana.

You work and live with lots of family. I think I read somewhere that at Thanksgiving, you have fifty-two people show up; they're all family. I mean, you're intermarried a lot in the Maui area, and then, you're involved in business with family, which seems like a very hard thing to do, especially when it's generational. How do you make that work? It can't be all sweetness and light.

I tend to leave it to Sandy and Wendy.

My wife and my daughter. I try to stay out of the loop as much as possible. But, you know, we live in the ranch house, the old ranch house where my grandfather lived. And you know, in fact, this year it's a hundred years old.

Congratulations. I hope you have new plumbing, though.

We do; we do. And Thanksgiving, even Easter, but not as big. But Christmas Day, families from all over come to the ranch. It's an important aspect for me and Sandy that they enjoy that this is their land, this is their 'aina, and the responsibility they have, but to be able to come together and enjoy a day together. Thanksgiving dinner; yes, gets up to forty-five, fifty sit-down dinner. We have to do a little rearranging in the living room, but they get it done.

You know, I've run into people who talk about having spent years on the ranch, and they always say the Rices take good care of their people. Meaning, their employees. How do you?

It's a matter of how you're brought up. You know, as the saying goes, you ride for the brand. Like in any business, whether you're in very nice brick and mortar, it's still the

people that make the business a success or not. Our ranch foreman always said, Henry, you tighten your own girth, your own saddle girth, you're responsible. But don't forget, the guy next to you is gonna make you good or not good. And so, you just naturally take care, and they take care of you.

Over the last few years, Henry Rice has slowly handed over the reins of Kaonoulu Ranch to the fourth generation. Although he says he's retired, he hasn't quite ridden off into the sunset, and he serves as senior advisor to the ranch.

Even our own ranch, the transitioning of bringing in three general partners that are of the next generation, one being my daughter Wendy, and a new general manager Ken Miranda, who's married to my niece, their ability to flow with new ideas, and take really careful calculated risks—not stupid risk, but calculated risk, is a lot better than in my time, where we tended to be more structured. I would say that's biggest thing I've seen.

You don't have trouble letting go of things; right? Your banking career. I mean, you seem like you're

Always looking ahead. Never dwell on what you did in the past. I think it's very important to look ahead all the time. For years, we had a foreman on our ranch, Ernest Morton, who was probably another one of my great mentors. He never looked backwards; he always looked at what was ahead. Never say whoa in a tight spot.

You can't take the cowboy out of Henry Rice. Here he is, back in the saddle, helping with the cattle drive in July 2016. In April 2017, Henry was inducted into the Pani'olo Hall of Fame in Waimea, Hawai'i, taking his place among revered Hawaiian cowboys of past and present. Mahalo to Henry Rice of Kula, Maui for sharing your story with us. And thank you for joining us. For PBS Hawai'i and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, a hui hou.

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You know, you're very self-deprecating. You know, you say you leave the family stuff to Wendy and your daughter, and you know, the younger generation is smarter than you are. Were you always this modest, or at some point, was there—

I'm not very modest.

You're pretty modest.

No.

I don't think I've heard you really take credit for anything.

They do it better.

Was there ever a different kind of Henry Rice?

I don't think so. I'm just who I am; myself. Maybe it's the local style. You're just never really that way.

[END]