

GUEST: EMMA VEARY 1
LSS 207 (LENGTH: 27:28)
FIRST AIR DATE: 10/21/08

Emma Veary, the beautiful singer who was known as “Hawaii’s Golden Throat,” performed in the most prestigious venues in Waikiki and socialized with Hollywood celebrities. Today, Emma Veary remains a Hawaiian musical treasure.

Aloha no; I’m Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. And I’m very pleased you’re joining me for this *Long Story Short* with the elegant Emma Veary. We’ll sit down with her to share stories next.

Emma Veary began performing at the age of 5 and came of age during World War II. She would headline at the top venues in Waikiki – the Royal Hawaiian and Halekulani Hotels. And she performed in New York City. Today, she lives a quiet life near family members on Maui and recalls small-kid-time in a loving Hawaiian household in Kapahulu.

Your mom was full-blooded Hawaiian?

Yes, she was full-blooded Hawaiian.

What about your dad?

Daddy was hapa. And we always said he had this much Hawaiian in him, you know. But um, he had some half-brothers. So I was always saying, Well, it’s either whole or nothing. [CHUCKLE] Rotten kid. [CHUCKLE]

Your dad worked at the harbor? Honolulu Harbor.

Oh, yes, Dad worked for Young Brothers. He was a tugboat captain. And I always tell everybody, Do you know I knew Mr. Jack Young, and Jack Young, Jr. who owned Young Brothers? Because we used to go down with Dad all the time.

Today, we don’t think of them as real people. It’s a corporate name.

Yes. No, we knew them. And so we’d go down there, we’d play pool with the guys. I’m an old garbage mouth as a result of that. Hanging around with the stevedores and the tugboat guys, you know; oh, boy, I have to watch it. But we used to go down there and play. And Mom would go do her business, she’d come get us, and we’d go home. And the nicest thing about that when he was working there, Dad ran the pilot boat. And in those days, Dad would take his tugboat, go Aloha Tower, pick up the pilot, and take him out to Diamond Head. And so as kids, we would go down with Dad, and he’d say, All right, be quiet. And we’d sit in the back of the tugboat. You know, and it was just so much fun. And on moonlight nights, it was just great. We all used to sing all the time. And because nobody had any money, what do you do? You sit down and you enjoy yourself and play music, and sing and dance. And of course, because we were from a poor family, we always had an ukulele. My brother used to play the ukulele, my sister danced, and I sang. And that was our entertainment, that was what we did because we didn’t have money. You know. And the neighborhood kids, we had a little thing going where, in those days, they had Party Pack, which was a drink like a Coke. And it was a tall bottle, and they had strawberry, root beer, and orange. And they would give you a dime a bottle, I think, or five cents a bottle. So the neighborhood kids would collect all of these bottles, and on the weekend, we’d take it all down to Koga Store [CHUCKLE] down the street, and get our money, and pool all of our money together and say, Okay, we’ve got so much money. We can go to Hawaii Theater or Princess Theater. But if we ride both ways—’cause we were in Kapahulu, now; if we ride both ways, we cannot have no popcorn or crack seed. So let’s take a vote. Maybe we ride one way, and we walk home; then we can have our crack seed.

That’s a long walk home.

So we’d go. We’d go to either Hawaii Theater or any of the theaters in town, which are no longer there, except Hawaii Theater. And we’d see our movie; and then we would play all the way down Kapiolani Boulevard, all the way to Kapahulu.

And how old were you then?

Up to Winam. We were just—oh, my; we were like twelve, thirteen and ...

That’s a nice little workout.

Yeah. We’d play all the way home. You know, and at that time, there weren’t many buildings on Kapiolani Boulevard. And it was just papyrus and coral. But we would just play all the way home, and then we’d peel off

and say, See you. You know, when we'd get to Winam Avenue in Kapahulu, peel off and say, Okay, we'll see you at school.

What was the rule about when you had to get home?

Our rule at home was we had to be home, bathed, and ready to have dinner at five-thirty.

Why, was that when your—

That was just—

--dad came home—

--the rule.

--or something?

Yes. Because Dad came home from work at that time, and we'd all sit down and have dinner. And we were all in our pajamas, getting ready to go to sleep, you know, after that. Do your homework.

M-hm. You didn't think you were missing out on anything material when you were a kid?

You know, I was always working. I started working when I was five. I've been singing since I was five, because I discovered that people wanted to hear me sing. And they would pay me. And being from a family who didn't have a lot of money, wow. I would—I had a special letter from the Liquor Commission so that I could go sing in clubs.

At age five?

At age five. And Mother would go with me. And I sang at all the big clubs. And at that time, later on, as time went on, all of the celebrities used to go to the Waialae Country Club; that was the place to go. And I used to sing there on weekends. So I had the pleasure of meeting all these lovely stars. And of course, one couple that you don't know, but there was Rochelle Hudson, there was Bette Davis, and there was Dorothy Lamour. And I had the pleasure of meeting Dorothy as a child when she was a very young woman, and again when I was working at the Halekulani. One night they told me, Emma, Dorothy Lamour is here tonight. And I went, Oh, my god. So I pulled out a medley of her songs, and sang them to her, and reminded her about when we met when I was a child. And she said, Oh, my god, she says, after hearing you sing those songs, I never want to sing them again. [CHUCKLE]

Aw.

But she was such a beautiful, beautiful woman. And at that time, we had so many theaters. You can't believe how many theaters we had that had shows.

Live shows.

Live shows. There was the Princess, the Hawaii, Liberty, Queen's, King's, Palace, Pawaa Theater, Kewalo Theater. These are all no more.

They were movie houses? They were—

They were movie houses.

--musical acts?

No; they were movie houses, but they would have music you know, between the shows. Like Radio City Music Hall. You know, they would have some come on and perform in between the movies.

That was standard in those days—

Well, they—

--in theaters?

They used to have a lot of that going on; yeah. So I used to go and sing at all of these theaters. And I sang at Hawaii Theater so many times.

I know you walked back from seeing the movies when you were a—

Yes; yes.

--a kid. How did you get around in those days when you were a very young singer?

My mother was always with me. My mother always took me wherever I had to go; she was always there with me. And she used to sew my little gowns and my curls, long curls—I had long hair way down my back, and she'd make these long curls with ribbons, you know, like. And then I met—while I was going through that phase, in 1941, Joe Pasternak came to Hawaii and saw me perform somewhere, and asked me to come to Hollywood, and he would groom me to become a star. And we had said okay. And I was supposed to leave on the 8th of December in 1941. And on the 7th, the war started. So he called me and he said, you know, to my mom, Does she still want to come? So my mother says, You have to ask her. So I got on the phone. I said, Well, Mr. Pasternak, I said, inasmuch as there's a war going on, I'd rather stay home with my family. So I lost out on that one.

True; the State went into martial—

Yes.

Well, it wasn't the State then.

Yes.

It was a Territory—

Yes.

--went into martial law, and—

Right.

--blackouts.

Right. And I didn't want to be away from my family if there was a war. So I gave up that—

You must had some thoughts about that, what if.

What if.

What if.

Oh, yeah, sometimes. But I never go there. I see what's happened to so many of these kids, that were at that point in their lives going through Hollywood, and what has happened to them. [CHUCKLE] And I got, there but for me—you know, I'm lucky not to have gone through that.

And you have a very wonderful career here.

And oh, I had a wonderful—

Now, what—

--career here.

How would you describe your singing? I mean, you have—well, one, you have this wonderful, elegant look; but you have this ...

Well, I started—

--formal—

I started—

--style.

--out wanting to be an opera singer. And I had the goods to do it. And I went to New York when I was fourteen, and—all alone—and went to a girls' school. And I stayed—I talked to the International House people who just—they were apartments, it was a home or a huge place for foreign students, college students. And I befriended some college students, and then I went to see the manager of the International House and asked if they wouldn't allow me to come and stay there on weekends, because I had no family. And so they allowed me to do that. So when I wasn't in boarding school, I would be at the International House, and I discovered Broadway. And at that time, all the biggest Broadway shows were on: Carousel, Song of Norway, Bloomer Girl. All of these shows were on Broadway at the time, and I fell in love with Broadway, and decided, okay, I can sing a little bit of opera, but I'd like to sing a little bit of Broadway too. And that's how I came into being able to—fortunately, I could pull it off. I could sing a little opera, I could sing a little operetta, I could sing some Broadway, and I could sing some popular songs. Then I could combine my Hawaiian music with that, and that's how I became an act when I came home.

Now, why did you come home? I mean that's—you know, New York. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.

Right, right, right. Well, you know, I kept going back and forth to New York, and I did a lot of summer stock there. And of course, I did do some shows here. I did at the Honolulu Community Theater. And that was after I was—let's see; was I was married at the time; yes. But I did some shows here with Donald Yap, who's still here. And loved it. And I was just going over some tapes the other day, doing Carousel with the Honolulu Community Theater.

How do you hold up?

Pretty good.

[CHUCKLE]

I'm still doing pretty good. [CHUCKLE]

And looking back at what you sounded like then, do you—were you all that, that you thought you were at the time?

You know what? I was shocked that—I was amazed. [CHUCKLE] You know how sometimes you don't know what you have, when you have it?

Right.

I was amazed with some of the things I could do vocally.

M-hm.

I still, you know, I still sing, I still work. But I miss—I always say I miss my old self. I miss my voice. It still works, it's still great, but it's not where it was because I'm not where I—you know.

Well, for those who weren't living here, or weren't alive in the 70s, your name was the class act around town. You were the headliner at the—maybe the first headliner at the Halekulani Hotel.

Yes; yes. They didn't ever have an act there. And Hal, Aku—

Your husband at the time.

I was married at the time. And I talked to him about doing the act. And so we went down and we were at the Royal Spaghetti House, and when we decided we wanted to leave that venue, and come to Waikiki. So he went and talked to the Halekulani, and talked them into putting me on the lanai there. And because of the way the room was, I said, I've got to design a stage that would work for me. So I had an H and I would put the piano in either side of the it was an H like that, the piano here, the piano there, and I had around H, and I could work here, I could work here, and I could work between the pianos. And so they built the stage that I wanted, and they built me a dressing room. And on opening night, I went to work at the Halekulani, and they had put a drape down in the back where the ocean was, to keep people from looking in. And so I said to them, Excuse me, what is that there? And they said, Well, that's to keep the people out. I said, You know, you have one of the most beautiful views in Waikiki. And I said, I want you to take that away. They said, Well, we paid five thousand dollars to build that thing. I said, Well, I don't want to go on if you're gonna have that there, because there are people passing by; they will become fans, they will become clients after and come into the show. I said, So I'm not gonna go sing until you put that silly thing up.

So they wanted to block the—

Yeah, block—

Block you—

Yeah.

--from the beach, even though it was an—

Because the people—

--outdoor venue.

Yeah, because the people would look in.

Well, it's fun—I have a different point of view on that. My vantage point was, I was one of the beach people. You know—

Right, right.

--the rug rats out there—

Right.

The kids and—

Yes; yeah.

--and the young adults who—

Yes.

--who were taking advantage of the free music in Waikiki.

I used to—

You could go up and down the beach, and—and—

I used to call them my—

--sit in the sand.

--my scholarship crowd. And eventually, they all came in. And they would come in and have dinner, and see the show. And they'd tell me, I'm the scholarship friends, you know. And I've met people on Maui; I'm friends with ali'i at—the Lavender King of Maui. And people come to up him all the time, and they know that we're friends, and I helped him get the business started. And he said, you know, people come up and say, I used to be here scholarship crowd. You know.

[CHUCKLE]

And I went, Oh, my god. **[CHUCKLE]**

That's right; they knew what time your show started, and they were there early.

And you know—

But they weren't in the—

Right, right, right.

--chairs.

And New Year's and Christmas, some friends would show up, just to be cheeky, and they'd get their wine and everything, and sit on the sand, and watch me. And I'd go, shame on you. **[CHUCKLE]**

And that was a phenomenon that I think a lot of people have forgotten or didn't know, when there were live showrooms in—

Yes.

--Waikiki, and there were the cheap seats on the beach.

Right. Right, right, right. But you know, I felt like, hey, where would I be without these people?

M-hm.

They are also people who will eventually come to see me. My fans are very precious to me. And I communicate—people call me, I talk to fans, and I have a relationship with my fans. Because I wouldn't be who I am without them.

In those days, wasn't it called, at the Halekulani—

M-hm.

--the Coral Lanai, where you performed?

Yes; it was on the Coral Lanai, yes. Yeah.

It wasn't House Without a Key; it was—

No; it was—

--Coral Lanai.

--the Coral Lanai. Yeah. Because the House Without a Key is next door; it was next door. Yeah. Yeah.

And then you were a headliner at the Monarch Room as well.

And then after I left—

The Royal Hawaiian.

--there, I went to the Monarch Room. And performed there for a number of years. And that was interesting. It was very interesting, and of course, there, I had a big orchestra. Which was another you know, style of work. Because the other, I had either two pianos or piano and a harp. And then I went to a thirteen-piece orchestra after that, with a piano player.

What was the most requested song when you were at the Monarch Room?

You know, everybody had their own different songs that they wanted to hear. Of course, everybody wants to hear *h h t*, because that was—

That's—

--the signature song. That was the signature song.

And also, a song written by Irmgard Aluli.

Oh;

Yes.

. Yes; that was also another signature song.

Emma Veary's social circle included some of the biggest names in radio and television at the time—Hawaii Five-O actor Jack Lord and his wife Marie; singer Jim Nabors; comedienne Carol Burnett; and Hal Lewis, the highest-paid disc jockey of the time, better known to radio listeners as J. Akuhead Pupule.

I remember when it was announced that you would marry Hal—

[CHUCKLE]

--Aku—

Right.

--Lewis. I—it seemed like such a mismatch, 'cause he was this—

[CHUCKLE]

--wild and crazy man, and you were this elegant, serene, beauty. How did that happen?

You know, that was so funny. I was sitting at home one day, and the phone rings, and this voice says, Hello, this is J. Aku Head Pupule. And I hung up the phone. [LAUGHS] And then he said—the phone rang again, and he says—

You thought it was a crank call?

Yeah. He says, Excuse me, he says, this is—he says, Don't hang up on me, this is Hal Lewis, J. Aku Head Pupule calling. I said, Yes, what can do I do for you, Aku? And he says, Well, I'm divorced, and I want to marry you. [LAUGHS] And I hung up the phone again. [LAUGHS] Hung up the phone again.

Did you think it was him that time, or you still thought it was a crank call?

I knew it was him, 'cause I recognized his voice. And I said, You're crazy. I hung up the phone. And so he called back, and I said, Okay, I will talk to you if you'll just be civil, and what is it that you want? He said, Well, I'm divorced, he says, I'd like to take you to dinner. I said, Okay, if you don't you know, go crazy on me, I said, I will go to dinner with you.

What did you mean, go—

Because—

--crazy on you?

Well, start talking silly, like I want to marry you, et cetera. And because he had always been good to me, on the radio. When I was singing with the symphony, and working around town, he always used to—since I was little, he used to play my whatever.

And promote you.

Music, and promote me. So he comes over, and I said, well—I told my mother and my children; I said, Well, J. Aku Head Pupule is going to take me out to dinner tonight. And they went, What? [LAUGHS] And I said, That's all right, I have to be nice; he's been nice to me all these years, you know. And so he comes to the door, and he

knocks on the door. And I open the door, and he says, Will you marry me? I slammed the door on him. It was the funniest meeting we've ever had. And finally, I said, Okay, don't talk silly; I'll go to dinner with you, let's go to dinner. We went to dinner, came home. Then he said, Well, I want to—you know, I want to meet your daughters. You know. So we went out to dinner, and he tried all of the shtick that he could. Oh, and the first night we went out to dinner, he took me—we went to the top of the Ilikai.

M-hm.

And so we get up there, and he's trying to impress me, naturally. We get up there, and the girl says, Yes? He says, I need a table; my name is J. Aku Head Pupule. And she says, I'm sorry, we don't have a table.

[CHUCKLE]

And he looks at me, and I start giggling, and he says, My name is J. Aku Head Pupule. And she said, I don't care who you are. [LAUGHS] She was brand new to the islands; she didn't know who he was. And he couldn't get in.

And what kind of a name is that—Aku Head Pupule?

I am hysterical.

[CHUCKLE]

I'm laughing so hard. Finally got the manager; they said, Oh, god, Hal, come on in. And they took him in. You know. But that's how we met. That's how we met. And then we took our children out, and he was a really nice man. I used to tell him, Why are you so abrasive? He said, Who the hell would listen to a nice guy; I get 'em so goddamned mad that they won't—they can't turn me off. And that's what he did.

Because they didn't know what he would say—

Yes.

--next.

Yes; yes.

But was he really that brash?

No, he was a real nice guy. He was a really nice man. You know. But—

So did you start to feel pitter-patter and flutter-flutter, or when did the—

Oh, oh—

--romance begin?

Oh, oh, gosh. [CHUCKLE] But he was—you know, he was a really nice man.

M-hm. And did you have fun times together?

Oh; oh, did we have fun times together. Yes; we had a lot of fun together. But people say, Well, why did you get a divorce? I said, You know, it's very difficult when you have two people; one works during the day, the other one works at night. Hal comes home from work, he goes to play golf, then he comes home to see me. I am walking out when he's coming in; okay? When I get home at night, he's asleep. He get up, and he goes to work. There is no—how can you maintain a relationship? We managed for ten years, eleven years living that way, but it's not easy. It's not easy to maintain a relationship on that you know.

So it had nothing to do with his abrasive—

Being mean or—

--ness or—

Yeah. No, no, no, no. He—

And the story about him was that he was the—everyone said he was the highest paid disc—

Yes—

--jockey—

--he was.

--disc jockey—

In—

--in the country.

In the country; in the country. I guess in the world, if you want to go there, because we—you know, he was. Definitely.

Does that mean you got accustomed to a life of luxury?

Yes, yes, yes. But I have to tell you this; I got the—I did the down payment for our home. [CHUCKLE]

Just because you have it—

For—

--doesn't mean you—

For—

--keep it.

Yeah. For—also for a home in Kahala, yeah, that we loved.

And then after you got divorced—you didn't marry again?

It took me a while before I married again. I did marry one more time. Actually, I'm a mother—I have two daughters. I've got two real daughters. I got nine fake kids. [CHUCKLE] I have children from wait; two other marriages. And there are nine of them. And they still call me Mother. They all moved to—a bunch of them have moved to Maui, and what they said was, What do we call you now?

Because—

I said, What did—

--of the divorce?

Yeah. What did you call me before? I divorced your father; I didn't divorce you. [CHUCKLE] You know, so they still all claim me, so I kind of got a big bunch of kids around. They're all grown up now, with children.

The move to Maui about sixteen years ago. You live—

Yes.

--near your daughter, Robin.

Yes. Robin, interestingly enough—I have two daughters. Noe is a kumu lomi lomi; she's a lomi teacher. She has taught all over the world. She's been to Switzerland, she's been to Germany. She's taught in Japan, and she loves her work. And she has two boys. And one of them has a son. So I have that great-grandchild. And Robin, who has become a musician, and is very successful at what she does, has three children, and two grandchildren. And so we're kind of growing here, you know.

And Maui is now—Maui is a preference over Oahu at this time?

For me? Oh, yes. Yes.

And now, you are a great—

Great.

--grandmother—

Yes.

--who appears to be ageless.

[CHUCKLE]

Would you mind saying how old you are?

I'm seventy-eight.

And don't look it and—

And so—

--don't feel it?

Sh-h. I feel it. [LAUGHS] I might not look it, but I feel it. No; I'm in good health. I've never, you know, drank or smoke. I've worked, and it's managed to keep me young. Just the work itself, you know. And just the attitude that—I won't let anything pull me down. I look at the world with different eyes, you know, than when you were--you just grow as you get older. And the aches and pains happen periodically, and you just say, Okay, so what. [CHUCKLE] Just keep going, you know.

Emma Veary, Hawaii's "Golden Throat" from the golden days of live music in show rooms up and down Kalakaua Avenue. The liner notes on one of her albums read: "Where in Hawaii can we find the class act - the best entertainment? Emma Veary at the Monarch Room of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel." Written by Emma's Kahala neighbor back then, none other than Hawaii Five-O star Jack Lord.

Mahalo to Emma Veary and to you for sharing company with me on *Long Story Short*. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. A hui hou kakou.

Video clip with production credits:

My mother was a very intelligent woman. You know, when she was a young girl, they gave her a scholarship to go to school—where was it, I guess the Mormon people, because you know, she was so bright. And she chose not to. But she was always reading, and reading. That was her thing, and she got us all reading; and my entire family reads constantly. Because of wanting to learn, and understand more about life, et cetera. And that's how—she always was that way; she always read from her childhood, up until she was, you know—still, when she lost her speech and I was taking care of her, she was still reading. You know, and writing notes to me.

GUEST: EMMA VEARY 2
LSS 208 (LENGTH: 27:22)
FIRST AIR DATE: 10/28/08

Many Islanders know of Emma Veary, the elegant singer who once headlined at the best Waikiki show rooms. But do you know that as a child, she lived at the Waikiki Natatorium with her family and more than twenty at-risk boys? Aloha no; I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii inviting you to join me for a conversation with a few surprises. Singer Emma Veary has lived an extraordinary life. We'll share stories with this Na Hoku Hanohano Lifetime Achievement award recipient, Emma Veary, next.

Emma Veary's strongest influence was her late mother, Nana Veary, a pure Hawaiian woman raised in traditional ways. Nana Veary dedicated her life to a spiritual journey and she loved everyone, including the rich-and-famous and the homeless. At one time, Nana took in so many boys (today we'd call them at-risk youth) that the family actually moved out of its rented home in Kapahulu and into the Waikiki Natatorium.

So you were a small family, but—

A small family of five.

--in blood, but not in terms of relatives. [CHUCKLE]

Oh. A huge family. You know, hanai here, hanai there; all these people. Mother would bring kids home who were on the brink of being delinquents, and help straighten them out. And one story is, you know, one evening, my dad comes home and everyone was asleep already. And we had a little two-bedroom home.

Where was this?

This was in Kapahulu on Winam Avenue. And we had this little two-bedroom home, and Dad and Mom slept in one bedroom, and three kids slept in the other bedroom. And we were all grown—you know, we were teenagers. And he comes home, the lights were out, everybody was asleep. And we hear this crash, bang, and this cursing and cussing. [CHUCKLE] My mother had brought home about twenty one boys who were on the brink of, you know, having problems.

Twenty-one?

And they were all asleep in our living room. And Dad fell over all of these bodies that were asleep, and he didn't know who was there, or what was happening. He was panicking. And here, Mother said, Oh, that's all right, Dad, these boys are having problems, I brought them home, they don't have a place to stay to live. So here we are, with all these kids there.

Were there unlimited resources to feed all these mouths?

Oh, no; no, no. They'd go ahead, and everybody, whatever we had, you eat. If we don't have, you don't have.

So these boys, twenty one strong, come to your small house in Kapahulu.

Right.

And the landlord—how'd the landlord feel about that?

You know, in those days, nobody cared. It was interesting; it was interesting because when I was little, we used to be within twenty feet of the road on the sidewalk on a main thoroughfare, and we would take our pillows and blanket, and our little goza mats, and go and sleep out all night long. They can't do that anymore. But this is what Hawaii was many, many years ago. And I miss it.

And when the twenty one boys moved in that night and—

Oh; yeah.

--and in subsequent days, your mom wasn't worried about you, as this pretty teenager in the house?

No, no. The boys used to take care of us. It was a different time than it is today. It was just absolutely amazing. They adored us. You know, and we had our favorites. And they would you know, we'd con them into doing all the work that we had to do. And the boys came and went. People would come and go in our lives. Nobody just stayed.

Can you share with us some names that perhaps we might know?

Well, we had Keo Nakama there; well, Johnny Costello.

Who's a musician.

We had Jimmy Kaku, who was also a musician and a singer. And Richard Kauhi. And he's quite an icon to the Hawaiians.

Well, were most of the boys musicians? Was that the common bond? Or was the common bond being futless, and having—

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

--nothing else to do?

A lot of futless, but a lot—they were musicians.

I'm trying to relate to your family moving to the Natatorium with all these boys.

[CHUCKLE]

How did that happen? What was that like?

Well, we had rented a home, and the people who owned the home, their daughter was coming back and they wanted the home for her, so we had to vacate. So Mother, who was working at the Natatorium at the time with Walter Napoleon, said, Mr. Napoleon, I need time off; I have to find a place to live. He says, What do you mean? She said, Well, we have to give up our house and find another. He said, Don't go anywhere. He says, You just stay here and work; I'll fix it up for you.

What did she do at the Natatorium? What was her job?

She was the matron of the Natatorium; whatever that meant. And she would hand out the towels and the keys, and everything. But she was also the lifeguard matron. She didn't know how to swim. [CHUCKLE] She said, I don't know how they gave me that; I can't even swim. She said, And here I am, the head of the lifeguards. But he said, Okay, Hannah, we have three rooms underneath the bleachers. He said, And one bedroom for the children, bedroom for you and Barney, and one for just like a living, you know, and kitchen. And then we walked right outside, from being under the bleachers, and there was a little bathroom, private bathroom for us.

But did he know you were gonna bring all those boys?

Well, the boys were beach boys. A lot of them were from the beach. So they would go home to their families. They had families, but Nana was the only one that could make them tow the line. And so they would come and, you know, visit, and go. And the first thing we did in the morning was jump in the water, and swim. The last thing we did at night was jump in the water and swim, before we went to bed. And because the bleachers—we never spent time in those bedrooms. The bleachers were heated from the sun, warm. We would just lay our mat there. After we jumped out of the water, we'd get a towel, towel-dry ourselves, lay down. We didn't need any blankets or anything, because it was warm from the sun, the day's sun.

You know, in my lifetime, I have swum in the Natatorium.

Oh, my god.

But I don't recall it as being particularly clean.

No; it—

Was it clean back then?

Well, I don't know. Because it wasn't concrete on the bottom. It was sand; it was sand. They built it on the sand, and I don't think they ever—it wasn't like a regular pool that has a bottom on it. Because we used to go down and pick up sand, and bring it up. You know. And the water just came in through the holes on the side. Overnight, it would more or less clean itself out. And then, you know, everybody comes swimming. And at night, the waves would come in, and the tide would just clear. You know, but you couldn't see the bottom.

And over time, I'm sure it got—

Oh, I'm sure; I'm sure. Yes, yes.

More and more deteriorated condition.

Right. And at that time, they were having swimming meets there too. And I know Ohio State used to come over. That's where a lot of the Hawaiian boys went to school. And they used to have the meets there, while we were there.

Wow. So it was big time.

Yes, yes. Oh, we used to have fun, 'cause we lived under the bleachers. We'd just go home, and we didn't have to go anywhere at night, you know.

You didn't feel a loss of privacy, or wishing for the kind of homes your friends had?

No. Never. We were just very happy with our lot. You know. And grateful.

And your mother says that that was probably the happiest time ever for her.

Yes. And I was going to Kamehameha at the time too, at one point. And I'd take the bus and go to Kamehameha School, and then come home to the Natatorium. [CHUCKLE]

Emma Veary loves sharing stories about her family – especially her mother, Nana Veary, who wrote this book, “Change We Must,” chronicling her spiritual journey. Nana immersed herself in Hawaiian theology, then Christian Pentecostalism and Zen Buddhism – literally traveling the globe in her quest for spiritual truths.

Your mother negotiated so many changes in her life. In fact, she seemed to do so effortlessly. She went from revering nature and speaking to the Hawaiian deity figures—

Yes. Right.

--to Christian Pentecostalism.

Oh, gosh, yes. [CHUCKLE]

To metaphysics.

[CHUCKLE]

You know, she seemed to have the two belief systems coexist. She still believed in the Hawaiian way, and—

Yes; yes.

--when she went to neighbor islands, she would ask the guardian spirits to allow her to come and partake of the joy of the islands.

Uh-huh. M-hm.

And yet, she believed in the Christian God. In the past, people had said, You gotta pick. You know, Queen Kaahumanu; Hawaiian ways out, Christian ways in. But she seemed to—she wanted both.

No. Yes. And this was her whole journey, to just balance—put them all in balance, and take a little bit from each, and put them all together, and make her own little thing. Which is what we lived by, and I've lived by, and I still do live by. A little bit of this, and a little bit of that, and make your own thing. I think that was her whole journey, is getting everything she could possibly learn about spirit and—and religion, et cetera, and putting it all together, and making this one thing that she could work with.

We know Nana Veary as this renowned spiritualist whom people came from far and wide to consult and see, and spend time with.

Yes. Right.

What was she like as a mom, starting out when you were a little baby?

I mean, she was just—you know, she was just our mom; that was it. And interestingly enough, when we grew old enough, we chose to go on her spiritual path with her. And that's what made life most interesting. Because whatever she was studying, we were studying. And we were chanting in Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan or whatever she was doing; we were doing it. So we were living her life, her book, with her; which I still do. You know.

For all of her life, she was in tuned spiritually, and went on these journeys for truth.

Yes. Right.

How did you and your brother and sister fit in?

Well, you know, again, we all joined emotionally, spiritually with her in her journey, and she'd come home and tell us what was happening with her. And we'd all exchange whatever was happening with us. And we enjoyed learning about the other parts of the world, and what their belief system was. And whenever she went anywhere, she always came back with all these wonderful tales to tell us, you know.

Now, so you're a grown up yourself, and your mom's on this spiritual odyssey.

Right.

You didn't think, H-m, how come only my mom is out there—

[CHUCKLE]

--in India searching for truth?

You know, we were sharing our mother since we were kids. You know. And we enjoyed sharing her with people. We felt so blessed to have her that we thought, Oh, let's share her with everyone. You know? And that was our attitude about it. You know, share her with whatever. And I know she was lecturing at one point at UCLA. And this young student got up in the auditorium and he said, Excuse me, Mrs. Veary—trying to be smart like all students are—and he said, I understand the Hawaiian are a dying race. And she says, Let me come back to that after I finish my lecture. Okay. After the lecture, she said, All right, young man, I'll answer your question now. I prefer to think that the Hawaiians are not a dying race; they are very busy creating an international race. Take my little granddaughter here; come here, Debbie. She says, This little girl is French, English, Spanish, Hawaiian, Japanese. She says, How more international can you get? She had a standing ovation. [CHUCKLE] But, you know, that's how she thought.

And did she bring to you her aha moments, her epiphanies?

Yes. We used to sit and have these discussions about what was happening in her life, and what was happening in ours, and how we were growing. And we didn't we didn't go out an awful lot; we didn't enjoy doing that. We liked to stay at home with the family. You know, we did a lot of things together.

And she said that she just learned that there's just not a big place in one's life for negativity.

Yes.

So she tried never to say—

No.

--anything bad. Did she succeed at home? I mean ...

Well, we had our—

As far—

--spankings and everything. I mean, if you want to call that negative. But—

But could she be positive about so many things?

Yes; yes. She taught us to see only the good. And I have trouble with one child who only sees good, and she will not see the other. I said, There is also something that is not good here, and you have to find a balance there.

You know. You just can't see only good, good, good, good, good; because not everyone is made up of the two.

Do you think your mother saw the negative, but chose not to acknowledge, really?

Yes; yes. That is non-acknowledgement of it, and nullifies it.

Are you that way too?

Yeah. I think I—

It sure takes away the petty things of life, doesn't it?

Yes; yes. I know I've sat one night and I said to myself, You know, Mom, I'm—this is very interesting. I talk to myself a lot at home.

[CHUCKLE]

Because I live alone, and the children are in the other house. And I said, You know, it's interesting; I think I have gone past you now spiritually. You know? Where you were—in my journey, because—

You picked up the baton and ran—

Yes, yes, yes. And I said, Which for me is very interesting. You know. I think I've passed you. Nanny-nanny-nanny. [LAUGHS]

How do you think you've passed her? In what ways have you been able to grow?

I've really been able to put what she spoke of into action. You know. And I have found that it works in so many areas in my life. You know. And of course, I think one of the biggest areas is the financial area. [CHUCKLE]

That I've been able to, you know, make that work for me. So I always says, Hey, Mom, I think I've gone past you; ha-ha.

Because she never mastered her finances?

No. No; because I've learned so much more since she's been gone, just by going inward and you know, trying to go—taking the baton and go further with it.

M-hm.

See how much further I can get. Because the world has changed an awful lot since she's been in it, and you have to make changes. You have to make changes;

Nana Veary, Emma Veary's mother, attracted many people to her through her welcoming personality. She even drew the interest of tobacco heiress Doris Duke who called young Emma "Tita," a Hawaiian word for "sister;" and whom Nana and Emma affectionately called, "Lahilahi," a Hawaiian word for "fragile." Nana Veary and Doris Duke seemed an unlikely duo. But the two bonded in friendship, traveling and searching for universal truths together.

How does your mom—

How did they meet?

--who is the lifeguard matron at the Natatorium—

Yes. Okay.

--meet this heiress, Doris Duke?

She was at a little dinner party at the old Lau Yee Chai, and she was there—I think she might have been there with Daddy Bray.

We should say that Daddy Bray was a fully credentialed kahuna.

Kahuna; yes, yes. And he loved Mom, they used to get together all the time. And so he called Mom after the party, and he said, You know, Miss Duke wants to meet you. [CHUCKLE] And Mother said, Daddy; she said, I have so many friends already, I don't need anymore. [CHUCKLE] But she and Mother had some crazy, crazy times.

They traveled the world together?

I think Mother went around the world with her three times. And of course—

Wow.

--this was wonderful, because—

Was this just a vacation?

Well, she loved India, and she'd always go to India. But they would go all over the world, and Mother would be seeking, and she'd go right along with Mother. And you know, just see what Mom's up to.

And what did your mom find in her search?

Oh; she went to a lot of places. She went to—but Mother was always seeking, finding different places to go to—spiritual places to learn about the religion of the place, and just trying to incorporate it into what would work for her. So it's kind of an international thing that she was trying to create herself a spiritual, what is it—her spiritual journey was trying to get all of these religions and make them work together, as one.

A few times on these trips, she said her intuition saved her life, and that of Doris Duke.

Yes, yes; yes, she told me about that. It was interesting things happening that way, you know.

Did you experience that from her when you were a child? Did she seem to know, have intuition or psychic ability?

Well, interestingly, my sister had it. And I had it; and I have it. But I don't use it; I don't use it at all. We were all kind of—we all saw. But I always tell my mother—I said, You know, my so-called, for lack of a better word, ministry is music.

M-hm.

I said, I sing, I heal through singing, you know, that's my calling, and that's what I love to do. So I leave that all to you guys, and you know, do my thing.

There were many people who were attracted to your mother's personality or—

Yes; yes.

--abilities. Who are some of the others who are well known? Doris Duke. You mentioned Jackie Kennedy?

Oh, yeah. Well, Jackie came and was a friend of Doris'. And my children kinda grew up down at Shangri La with Auntie Lahi. And so it got to the point where every time—when Jackie met the two children, my two daughters, she asked if they would play with Jon-Jon and Caroline. So Robin became Jon-Jon's buddy; she took care of Jon-Jon. And Noe, Cathy, became Caroline's friend. So this went on for a number of years; whenever they'd come over, Jackie would call me and say, Emma, this is Jackie. I said, I heard you were in town. And she said, Can I borrow your two beautiful daughters? I said, Fine. You know, and they'd go. And I never really met her 'til months—'til years later when I was in New York because I don't like to push my—you know, I don't ordinarily tell everybody my last name, just so I want to be normal. I don't want to be that lady that's up there somewhere. Because the whole attitude of your relationship changes.

So does that mean you didn't enjoy the star treatment when everybody knew your name here, and was familiar with your work?

I'm me. [CHUCKLE] You know, it's nice that somebody says—you know. But I get embarrassed. [CHUCKLE] I still do get embarrassed when people say, [GASP] And I've actually been out sometimes, and if I look—if you pardon the local expression, junk, no makeup, goofy, right? Somebody say, You know, you look just like, I'll say, You know, they tell me that all the time; thank you so much, I'm so flattered. And I'll walk away.

[CHUCKLE]

And whoever is with me says, Why did you do that? I said, Oh, 'cause I look junk. [LAUGHS]

Both Emma and her mother Nana Veary were well-known figures in Hawaii. And they shared many of the same sensibilities, going back to Nana's traditional Hawaiian upbringing. As was common in those days, Nana was hanai – adopted. She was raised by her grandmother (whom she called her mother) and Nana spoke the Hawaiian language of her elders.

In those days, it was the old Hawaii, and the old Hawaiian language, which was rich in metaphors. And the missionaries came along and changed that.

Yes. Well, you know, even the pronunciation. Mother, when she spoke Hawaiian, it was melodious, and it was soft and gentle. You know, I'd hear her talk, and I'd hear someone else talk, and it was like a different language. You know. It was KalAkaua.

M-hm.

KalAkaua. KUhiO. You know. But soft, not guttural, like they do today. You know, it was just—

Did you grow up speaking fluent Hawaiian?

We weren't allowed to speak Hawaiian at that time in the schools. They weren't allowed to speak Hawaiian at all.

Could you understand your—

So I never—

--mother and father?

I could understand, but I could never speak it. We never learned. And then Mother taught Hawaiian later on, but we were grown up and had families, so we didn't really learn. And I've always felt terrible about that. But when I heard that Auntie Nona didn't speak Hawaiian, I felt good.

[CHUCKLE]

I said, Okay.

It was the time.

I'm okay. Yes. And she said the same thing; they weren't allowed to speak Hawaiian, you know.

I know you know this book—

Yes.

--well. If I could just point your attention to this part where your mom writes, *The language is a riddle—speaking of the—*

Yes, yes.

--Hawaiian language. *Before the missionaries came and converted the language into the written word—the Hawaiians used figures of speech in language—that was like poetry.*

Yes. Right.

I was fortunate, she says, to be taught to speak Hawaiian in the old way. My mother taught me to speak the language softly, without saying anything negative, or elaborating. Leave the details out, she said; speak softly.

Speak softly. So beautiful. Well, you know, it's like, ***The Heavens weep, and the earth flourished.*** That's how you said it was raining. Now, that is how poetic and how beautiful, you know. And it was just beautiful to hear her talk.

And why leave the details out? What was the point of being instructed to leave the details out?

Yeah. You waste a lot of energy with details sometimes. You know? It's unnecessary, you get to the point; you get where you're going without all the little stuff in between.

You know, as people age, I thought, and maybe I'm wrong. I thought change became harder to navigate.

And maybe the truth is, it's human nature to resist change.

[CHUCKLE]

But not for your mom. She said, *I let changes take place in my life; I know they must, and I know they will. I accept all change as a spiritual adventure, and begin the discovery of God in every new condition.*

Right. Yes, yes.

That's saying a great deal, because there are—

Right.

--so many things that are hard to let go of.

Right; right. And of course, one of her things is, ***Let go of all negativity. Do not give them power.*** And that's a big one; that's a biggie. And I've been working very hard on that one. [CHUCKLE] And I think I've done pretty good with it. And she says, ***From the highest peak of my consciousness, I look down upon the nothingness of things and see instead the beauty of God in all, for He is all.*** And I love that. I absolutely love that.

And you know from her life that those aren't just words.

Yes; she lived it. She lived it. And I've tried to live by that. By what she taught me. And it works; it does work.

Emma Veary is a treasure filled with surprises – kind of like a box of chocolates! Mahalo to Emma, and to you, for joining me to share stories from a remarkable life in Hawaii on *Long Story Short*. And thank you too, to those who've written us notes expressing appreciation for our efforts to inspire viewers through quality programs on PBS Hawaii. I'd like to express my appreciation to you for your support and encouragement. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. A hui hou kakou.

Video clip with production credits:

One day, I was sitting around, and someone called and said, you know, I am a healer from New Hampshire, and your mother comes to me all the time. And I sat in my little cottage, and I said, Mom, you go and see everybody around the world; how come you're not coming to see me? [CHUCKLE] And I could just hear her laughing and saying, My dear, you had me all of those years; you know, let me go. [CHUCKLE]

Do you think she's still a presence?

Well, she is a presence to a lot of people you know, that we're not aware of. But people will meet me and say, you know, that Nana has come to me. And I go, Oh, doo-doo-doo-doo, here we go, you know. [CHUCKLE]