

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



TITLE: Ulalia Woodside

LSS 1121 (26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 7/10/2018

And we are, aren't we, the state that has the most quickly-disappearing species.

We continue to be an endangered species capital. The Bishop Museum, not that long ago, had an exhibit on feather work and Hawaiian birds, and they also had a timeline up on the wall of when birds went extinct. And ... it brought tears to my eyes to stand there, and to look at when I was born, and I don't remember the number of birds, and to see the number of birds that had gone extinct in my life. That was hard to look at.

She grew up tagging along with her father as he worked on nature preserves. And now, she is protecting many of those special places of Hawai'i. Ulalia Woodside, next, on Long Story Short.

One-on-one engaging conversations with some of Hawai'i's most intriguing people: Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox.

Aloha mai kākou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Ulalia Woodside has dedicated her career to managing and protecting the lands and other natural resources of Hawai'i. She's also a kumu hula with a deep connection to the Hawaiian culture. In 2016, Woodside became the executive director of the Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i, overseeing forty thousand acres of preservation areas, not only Hawai'i, but as far away as Palmyra Atoll, which is a thousand miles south of the Hawaiian Islands. Her love of the land and her culture came to her early and easily, taught by example by her parents. Her mother, Leiana Woodside, was a kumu hula and curator at the Queen Emma Summer Palace, and her father, David Woodside, was a wildlife biologist and naturalist.

I was very fortunate to be born and raised in Waimānalo. I think I had a unique upbringing. My parents had me a little later in life. My mother was forty-four when she had me, my father was forty-six. Now, that's nothing, but back in the day, that was considered late. You know, my mother was born and raised in a Hawaiian lifeway. Her mother, and her mother before her, they had this vision of what it means to be a Hawaiian woman. And in our family, my grandmother embodied that. She embodied what it meant to be a Hawaiian woman, or this image of Haumea, the goddess, the deity, that energy that is the life source of creation and of birth. That Haumea takes many forms.

What was your grandmother's name?

My grandmother was Ida Pakulani Ka'aihue Kai'anui. And you know, she was born in 1888, and she passed away in, I think it's 1974 or 1976.

So, born during the days of the monarchy, and died after all the cultural unrest of America.

And statehood; right.

And after Hawai'i's statehood; yes.

Yes; until statehood. So, you're exactly right. And because my mother is the youngest daughter of fifteen children—she's number thirteen, and my mother has me at forty-four, what this means is, I have this really short linkage back to 1888, in a way; right? And so, our family traditions really compact in these two generations, is the way that I was raised. And I think that's quite unique. It made it challenging going to school at times. You know, your parents are listening to Frank Sinatra, and your friends' parents are listening to, you know, the Beatles or, you know, Neil Diamond, or something a little bit more contemporary, and we didn't have a television when I grew up. My mother wanted to have a yard that had Hawaiian plants in it. She wanted a lo'i, so right there on the beach in Waimanalo, my father created a lo'i for her. So, I grew up working in the lo'i there in Waimānalo. We went fishing. My father and I would lay net back in the days when, you know, you still could lay net. In my community, there weren't a lot of children my age, so I went to work with my parents, I went to board meetings with my parents. I went to Audubon Society Christmas bird counts with my father from a young age. I guess it's a shift in how we raise our families nowadays. My parents didn't spend their days taking me to my activities, except hula. You know, my upbringing was going with my mother as she would develop hula productions for State Foundation Culture and the Arts, or for the Aloha Week Festival. And she would really have the leaders and the influencers of kumu hula, and they'd design these productions together. My father would help with the staging and the plants. And you know, those were the things that I needed to participate in.

Now, hula is very intensive, and if you're passionate about it, you can't have enough of it. But there are some kids who say: Oh, no, do I have to go today again? What was your situation?

You know, I started dancing hula before I could remember. I have pictures of me, very young, dancing hula. And it was non-negotiable.

Nobody asked; right?

Nobody asked.

You just did it.

And there was never gonna be a time when hula was not gonna be a part of my life. So, that connection with hula, that responsibility to hula, was there from the beginning, and will be there 'til the end. But it was not something that I could in any way step away from by choice.

But did you want to?

You want to, and then there was a lot of crying involved with hula.

Do I have to do that again, you mean?

And in that way, you know, when your grandmother—my grandmother was a kumu hula, my mother and two of her sisters were kumu hula, there's an expectation of how you will perform. And there's an expectation of excellence, there's an expectation that you will grasp quickly the dance or the chant that you need to learn. And that wasn't always the case, and sometimes I didn't want to practice. Sometimes I wanted to play, sometimes my feet didn't do what they were supposed to do. But there are so many things that hula teaches you, and it's something that has existed in my life. You learn that you can do almost anything. You can do things you might not want to do, and you can do them well.

Now, was your dad Hawaiian as well?

My father wasn't Hawaiian. But he was born and raised in Kapa'au, Kohala on Hawai'i Island, and his father came to Hawai'i to be a part of the Kohala Mill system that they had. So they had long roots here in Hawai'i, but he wasn't Hawaiian. This was his homeland; it was the only homeland he knew. He loved this place, and he loved the values and the way of life these islands had created. So, the forest and those plants created a relationship that we have with them, created this aloha 'āina, this concept of mālama 'āina, this responsibility to place. And he embraced that, and that was his career. My father had spent the majority of his career and his life in remote places caring for Hawai'i, caring for the natural resources, the forests, the birds. And so, when they came together, they brought their two worlds together.

He let you tag along in his work, which was fascinating and beautiful, out in the outdoors and with the discipline of understanding the environment. What was that like? Where'd you go? What'd you do?

I distinctly remember we went out to Mānana, Rabbit Island, right off of Waimānalo and there were rabbits on that island. And one of the things that my father did was spend a lot of time in remote places. He went to Jarvis Atoll and Rose Atoll, he went up to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, Tern Island, Nihoa, Necker, Mokumanamana, and he'd spend long time there. And one of the things that he would do when he would go to places is he would eradicate small mammalian predators, or he'd eradicate things that were disrupting the natural system there; sometimes cats. And on Rabbit Island, it was rabbits. And so, it had been years when rabbits weren't supposed to be on Mānana anymore, but we'd go there, and there's a rabbit on the island. And I remember my father getting the gun out. And we were with a number of other of his adult wildlife friends, and they're doing their thing. We're on a bird count, and we're studying. And I am jumping up and down: Run, rabbit, run, get away, get away, get away!

And you know, it ... it was dispatched. My father dispatched that rabbit. And then we cleaned it, he and I cleaned it, and then we ate it that night. But I got to do these really interesting things with him. And going to Mānana was one of those really transformational days. You have an 'ewa'ewa chick, sooty tern chick, just a puffball of fuzz in your hand. Rob Shallenberger used to work with my father at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and he's also a great photographer. And he took this picture of me, and you can just see in my face how excited I am to have this little puffball in my hand.

As a child, Ulalia Woodside yearned to be like her father, working in the field and watching out for nature. And that's the path she started on as a young adult. But she steered in new directions, finding other ways to help the lands and reefs of Hawai'i.

My very first job was a place where my father worked for a number of years, the Department of Land and Natural Resources. The Land Division needed student help, a student helper position, so right out of high school, I think two months or so after I graduated, I started working for the Department of Land and Natural Resources. And it was a tremendous experience. I worked there all through my undergraduate years, until I got my bachelor's degree. And I learned about land tenure in Hawai'i, I learned about state leases, I learned about shoreline issues, I learned about long tenured families that have long deeds that go back to Kamehameha V.

Were you doing paperwork, or were you out in the field?

It evolved. So, when was a student helper, I mostly made copies. I also was a clerk typist for a period of time, and at that time, I got to see the leasing documents come through.

So, you were reading the documents as well as processing.

Right. You know, file them and understand them, different islands, the different issues that are going on. And after I graduated from college with my bachelor's degree, I worked there for a little bit of time as a land agent.

What does a land agent do?

So, at that time, I was helping process shoreline certifications. So, people who would like to build or develop on coastal properties, you frequently need to identify where the shoreline is, because there are specific regulations about setback. It really taught me a lot about, you know, how things happen. It was an incredible growth period for me.

All while you're going to college and learning.

All while I'm going to college.

What were you studying in college?

In college, I was studying political science. And then, I also got a second degree in Hawaiian studies, and I got a certificate in Hawaiian language. And so, at the time, with the political science, I was thinking of going to law school at the time. And had some other friends that were in political science, and they were moving on to law school, but I was working, you know, with the state.

So far, you're following a similar path to your father, but you're taking it in a different direction, 'cause you're interested in the decision-making and the issues involving regulation.

At that time, I was, you know, I really was interested in that. And shortly after I finished high school, the State of Hawai'i workforce went through a really large reduction in force. And so, I had only been now in my permanent land agent position, was the bottom of the rung position for just a couple of years. Not even two years, I think. And so, there was somebody else with greater seniority than I did, and so with that reduction in force ...

You got bumped.

I got bumped. I got bumped out of that position. And you know, if that hadn't happened, I do think about, would I still be working at the Department of Land and Natural Resources today if that hadn't happened?

After losing her position with the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Ulalia Woodside entered graduate school at the University of Hawai'i to study urban and regional planning. From there, she took a new job in the private sector, where her

interests expanded beyond land management and conservation and into cultural preservation.

And then, I went to a private planning and engineering firm that worked with the Department of Transportation to repair highways or build big highways, and you know, DOT Airports, and you know, had to go out to the community of Keaukaha and talk about the runway that's next door, to speak to people who want to build industrial parks in areas, and large resort developments, and golf courses. And so, seeing that side of the equation gave me another level of understanding of our lands here, how decisions are made, why we see that building where we see it. And it was a hard time. When I was working there, the requirement for a cultural impact assessment became law. And prior to that, it wasn't a requirement. Being able to be a part on that front edge of trying to put this into place, and going out and speaking to people of place, and gathering their stories, and then coming back and finding ways in which by incorporating what is about this place actually creates a project.

Why was it a hard phase?

It was a hard time because at times, you know, you'd sit across from somebody that had a piece of property, and you know, in the environmental review process, you do a biological assessment, you do an archaeological assessment. You see all of these, all of these treasures that they have on their property. And I remember sitting there, and I remember the gentleman looking at me and he said: I just want to cut it up and sell it. And I, you know, was jazzed. We had found, you know, this 'ilima on the property, and this. And it made me think about the other skills that we might need in those conversations. And it also made me think about how the energy within our community helps to shape the change of something. And what I mean by that is, that awareness of what you have on your property of natural resources and cultural resources, that's also known by the community. And that community can inspire a developer or a landowner to create something that is even better than what they may have had in mind in integrating and incorporating that unique plant that you found, or that portion of a trail that happens to come through their property. And that really, really got me inspired.

In 2002, Ulalia Woodside joined Kamehameha Schools to work on 'āina-based educational programs, which ultimately changed how Kamehameha Schools and other Hawai'i landowners managed their natural resources, including lands.

I was very fortunate at that time, as I was going through that work and starting to get itchy, to be able to be proactive. And at that time, the Kamehameha Schools had gone through a redevelopment of their strategic plan in 2000, and their land division that managed their agriculture and conservation lands was revisiting how they

manage those lands in line now with the new strategic plan that really saw those lands not as separate from the mission.

Not commodities, but part of who Kamehameha Schools is.

And also, a platform through which the mission could be achieved.

I see; with people.

With people, and with education. I was very fortunate to be invited there by Neil Hannahs. Enjoyed working with him for ... almost fifteen years. There was a kīpuka, there was this stronghold on Kaua'i, and one of the first projects I got to work with was out in Waipā, Kaua'i on the north shore of Kaua'i with the Sproat family and the Mahuiki family at that time, and the Hawaiian farmers of Hanalei. And they recognized the value in their ahupua'a, and it had been used for, you know, ranching over the years. But that community remembered the taro traditions, and they still raised kalo, and that's what they felt was the abundance and the wealth of Waipā. But they were talking to Kamehameha Schools, I think, in the 80s or so, and you know, it was at a time when Kamehameha Schools was actually considering putting in a development.

I remember that.

And they had to find a way to develop a use that would be productive on the lands, would recognize Kamehameha Schools' needs, but also leave room for being proactive about the growing the community and also where we could be. So, one of those great lessons, you know, I learned of my time there is, when you work for a perpetual organization that at that time had been around for a hundred and fifty years, you know, your spot is about this big on that spectrum. You know, what are you gonna do in that spot on that spectrum, and are you gonna do some things that make it harder for those that come down the spectrum, or is what you're doing keeping the door open, setting the table? Is it creating an opportunity for those that are going to come after it? And that's what the Hawaiian farmers of Hanalei and those families did, is they found a way to be productive users of the land, create capacity within their community, and start to pilot and showcase what a thriving ahupua'a looks like, with students and learning happening there, which then set the table for us to take that to a whole different place.

So, those were very important years for Kamehameha, and those decisions that were made.

Yeah.

In 2016, Ulalia Woodside was selected to be the executive director of the Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i. Big job, overseeing the protection of nature preserves across the ridges and reefs of Hawai'i, and in many of the same areas that her father helped to protect.

In working at Kamehameha Schools, being able to think about this return on investment, and the changes that we were making to create this abundance in place, we had worked alongside the Nature Conservancy as partners across the table with the Hawai'i Conservation Alliance, working together in developing management strategies. We frequently visited each other's property to see how species were being managed, how they were thriving, to learn those lessons from each other. And so, when there was the opportunity to join the Nature Conservancy, I valued the work that had been done there. And also, you know, working at Kamehameha Schools, even when you work for the State, you're carrying on a legacy. And I really thought about the legacy of the Conservancy in Hawai'i since 1980, and the change that they had brought to Hawai'i, the idea, the concept that there are certain lands that are so special that we should set them aside, and we should protect those lands so that what's unique about them gets preserved. Now, at the Nature Conservancy, one of the places that we manage is Palmyra Atoll, a thousand miles south of Hawai'i. I knew my father went to all of these atolls, but I came to learn that he was a part of the group that went out to Palmyra and identified the biological importance of that place, and integrity of that place, and was part of the effort to protect it, and to see the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognize that place as an important place that needs to be protected, and to help to encourage and work with the Nature Conservancy in order to set that place apart so that those rare species, those coconut crabs, the largest breeding colony of red-footed boobies in the world, that that continues to exist, a reef like no other.

It just seems like everything you've been through took you to this place, this job that you hold now. Do you feel like that?

I think life finds its way. And I do feel like I have stayed a course. I have followed in the footsteps of my parents. But I have evolved along the way. I have been that Haumea and that shapeshifter that has moved along the way. I try to find places where I can be relevant, where I can help improve the condition of our world that we live in, that I can make connections between people and nature so that we might be inspired to have a home that is thriving along with us. And I've been very, very fortunate to find people to spend time with and to find employers and places where I can work towards that mission, work towards that mission of ensuring that we have Island Earth, our earthly home, our earth home and our island home, our Pacific home thrives in that way.

Not an easy job. And it takes constant management.

It's not an easy job. It takes constant management. But if we come back to hula ... it is about the collective, and it is about recognizing that together, we produce something that is amazing.

Ulalia Woodside says she'll continue to use valuable insights from her hula experience to bring together different people and organizations, and preserve and protect the natural resources of Hawai'i and beyond. Mahalo to Ulalia Woodside of Waimanalo, O'ahu. And thank you, for joining us for this edition of Long Story Short on PBS Hawai'i. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha nui.

For audio and written transcripts of all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit PBSHawaii.org. To download free podcasts of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, go to the Apple iTunes Store or visit PBSHawaii.org.

So, between regular school and summer school, I would go with him to work. And he was managing Ki'i Refuge. Now it's known as James Campbell Refuge out in Kahuku. California grass would grow very, very quickly, so driving the tractor and mowing the berms, and keeping the grass down was one of my responsibilities.

[END]