

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



TITLE: Alice Inoue

LSS 1309 (26:16)

FIRST AIR DATE: 2/18/2020

In the 60s, being mixed was not really something that was- that you would be proud of. It's- I think when I came to Hawai'i, it seemed to be celebrated almost like, wow, you're hapa. And it felt like very normal. But it wasn't, growing up. It wasn't normal. And living even in San Francisco, it didn't feel like I was part of a San Francisco culture.

She calls herself a T.C.K. Or third culture kid who never fit in anywhere. Yet she says she overcame all the negativity she felt toward herself and the world around her. And today counsels people on how to be happy. Meet this life coach 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. Alice Fong Inoue of Kaka'ako, O'ahu has had many jobs in her life, including teacher, television show presenter, astrologer and feng shui consultant just to name a few. Currently, she's an author, a life coach and the founder of Happiness U. That's an organization whose mission is to teach people how to balance their lives so they can be happy. Alice Inoue always says she was anything but happy when she was growing up. Born to a Chinese mother and German Irish father in San Francisco, she felt out of place, whether she was in America or in her mother's homeland in Taiwan.

First, I just want to ask you used the expression that was the first time I've heard it; third culture kid.

Oh, T.C.K. Yes, third culture kids. So a third culture kid is someone who was raised not in the country of their origin. And the culture of a T.C.K. Is such that you become- you create your own culture. So if you think about it, I grew up speaking English in Taiwan, which was a Chinese culture, and going to an American school and then later going to Japan. So-

And speaking Japanese.

And speaking- Yeah. So I never felt like I really fit in anywhere. And so that is a very common thing for T.C.K and T.C.K.'s. I think Hawai'i has a lot of T.C.K.s because Hawai'i

culture is not like mainland culture either. Like Obama's a T.C.K. There's a lot of- and now- now we are adult T.C.K.s.

Kind of like being between cultures.

Yeah. Yeah. So I don't feel like you belong to any culture. I don't feel like I belong to any belief system. I don't feel like I belong anywhere. In fact, I feel that I am-

To this day?

Yeah. I don't feel like I belong anywhere. Yes, I feel like I'm me. And either you get me or you e- you- you resonate with what I do and what I talk about or you don't. That's kind of it. So I don't feel like I- like I don't feel like I belong to Hawai'i or I don't feel like I am. I live in Hawai'i. I love Hawai'i. It's supported me. I've had amazing learning experiences here. But I- but I'm not from here. So when people say, where are you from? I really feel like there's no answer to that.

So you grew up in San Francisco until you were eight, but you didn't feel like an American?

No, I don't really remember much of that. And in fact, I somehow got teased as a child because somebody saw my mother being Chinese. And so the words such as Chinese pig, and so I was very much extricated from American people. So I never had a really good childhood in America. Then going to Taiwan, I had brown hair. I was different from them. So I was very much not connected to any culture. And so I never felt like I was one or the other.

You said your mother's from Taiwan. What about your dad?

My dad, he was uhh- He was a merchant marine from Rhode Island. And so he was twenty six years older than my mother and met her when she was working at like a bookstore in Taiwan or something. And somehow they connected and brought her to America. So this is in the 60s.

So were hapa kids in San Francisco?

No...

Not really huh?

I think back in the 60s, being mixed was not really something that was- that you would be proud of it. I think when I came to Hawai'i, it seemed to be celebrated almost like,

wow, you're hapa. And it felt like very normal. But it wasn't. Growing up it wasn't normal. And living even in San Francisco, it didn't feel like I was part of a San Francisco culture.

And then in Taiwan, it didn't feel normal either.

No, because then again, my father was American and they're all Chinese and I lived with the whole bunch of my mother's family, relatives and Chinese cousins. So I was always the odd one because I was part American.

Why did you move to Taiwan after-

So what it was, was I believe that my mother and I- my father was a merchant marine. So he would be away a lot and left my mother and I in San Francisco. And I think she must have missed home or something. So he thought, well, I travel all over the world on the ship anyway. Why don't you just go live near your relatives in Taiwan? So that's why we- I grew up over there. I went to an American school, but I lived with a whole bunch of Chinese relatives.

After Taiwan you moved back to the United States to go to-

-College.

--college?

Yes. So at 16, I graduated from high school and I moved back to go to college. And I still didn't know who I was. I didn't feel American college scared me with all the Americans. And they were very American. And I didn't feel American even though I spoke English. And I was very unhappy. I- I was umm... I started eating. I gained a lot of weight. And I was just unhappy. And even though there's nothing to be unhappy about, it was my reality. And the final... Week of school. Back then, we passed notes. We didn't have text, right? And some classroom- somebody passed a note. Had my name on it. I didn't know who it's from, but I opened it up and the note said, you're always so unhappy. Do you ever- do you even know what happiness is or something to that effect? And I looked around. I didn't know who it was. But that, I believe, was sort of the catalyst to me recognizing, huh, is there such a thing as I didn't know that I was putting out that vibe? I had no idea-

It's how you always were right?

Yeah. I complain and blame and feel sorry for myself and cry. So I didn't know that- that- that you could search this or I didn't realize that I was giving that out. So I believe that kind of started the trigger. And then after college, I went to live in Japan and it was just, I think, little- finding little pieces of myself along the way.

After graduating from the University of California at Santa Cruz, Alice Inoue spent the next four years living and working in Japan. Then she decided, on a whim, to move to Hawaii.

You've said that you've had 30 to 40 jobs, which is astounding. And I remember you've said that when you were in Japan, you had eight jobs simultaneously.

I'm kind of entrepreneurial by nature. So I- I didn't know the word entrepreneur. You don't know that word when you're growing up. But it- when I look back so in college, uhh, I just learned how to cut hair. And so I started cutting people's hair for money. So I used to make money, just cutting people's hair in the dorm bathrooms. And then going to Japan, it was- I was there to teach English as my first job. But I also know how to play piano. So I started teaching piano. I also spoke Chinese, so I started speaking Chinese. Umm, I also cut hair as I would start cutting people's hair. So I started to pick up all these different jobs based on the skills that I had. And I really enjoyed that. And my life has just been a series of one thing after another. Not for any other reason other than I really get excited by learning new things and then being able to share them with others. And if I can use that to- as a profession, even better.

And did you get tired of what you were doing? Is that why you stopped?

New opportunities would come up. And I think that...

You don't have time for everything.

Yeah, so it's just the situations would change. And I just wanted to do something more. I would just- it just kept evolving.

You've lived in Hawai'i for- is it 30 years now?

30 years, exactly. This year I was living in Japan. And I watched a television show of Konishiki and Konishiki is a sumo wrestler that was very, very popular at that time. And there was a show about him coming to Hawai'i. And I watched it. And it's- it's funny because I didn't know anything about Destiny or Syncr- I didn't know any of that. But all I knew was like, Hawai'i, I want to go to Hawai'i. And so back in- this is 1989. I call the travel agent and uhh, booked a flight to Hawai'i. When I got to Hawai'i, I- I... Had never felt more comfortable in any place in my whole entire life. It was as if I'd come home and that's the only way I could describe it. And the taxi driver said that if you're a first time to Hawai'i, you have to go to Waikīkī. You have to go see Diamond Head. So I remember being in front of the Duke Kahanamoku statue and laying there thinking, gosh, I have an American passport. I would love to live in Hawai'i because I had already been in Japan for about three years- four years at that time. And at that

moment, a newspaper classified ads blew by and basically blanketed my body. And when I looked at it, it had all these help wanted ads. I thought, oh, my gosh, maybe I could work in Hawai'i. So I took my quarter and it was by that police station on Kalakaua.

When pay phones-

-Pay phones-

--Took a quarter.

Yes! And I called and I got an audition. And then I had to go to Liberty House at that time, bought an outfit, auditioned or not auditioned. What is it- interviewed. And then I got the job and I moved to Hawaii within a few weeks.

Wow.

And not knowing anybody.

And many people were between islands, maybe between coastlines in America. But you. That's a big move.

It was huge. And I think just-

To do it alone.

Yeah, I was alone and I didn't know anybody. And it was kind of a- I don't know why.

That was a great leap of faith, would you say?

Yeah, it was. And it was just right. It just felt right. And it was uhh- it was a rocky start in the beginning. But 30 years later, here I am.

Once you got to Hawaii, how did you make a life for yourself besides landing a job first thing?

So when I first moved to Hawai'i, I didn't know anyone except the person that had hired me. And we didn't have Internet back then. So you couldn't really research people so you don't really know about them. So the first company I worked for... It was during the time of that real estate boom. That was uhh, a lot of Japanese were buying buildings and buying condos here. So it was a kind of a real estate company. And it was it was difficult only in that they weren't as ethical as uhh- as you would think a company was. And there's just a lot of complexities that came. So imagine coming to Hawai'i with

beautiful weather, just people that are so welcoming and then working at a company where the only person I knew was the boss. And his idea of work was, you come in at eight o'clock in the morning and you don't finish until midnight. And I didn't know any other way. I didn't know about labor law. I didn't know anything. So it took me a good year before I kind of got a little bit more entrenched into the community and realized like, oh, this is not how you- how you have to- have to live.

You married somebody very well known here.

Yes. Yes.

Egan Inoue.

Yes.

Racquetball champ and martial-

Martial-

Mixed martial arts practitioner.

Yes. Yes.

And that's why your last name is Inoue now.

Yes. People always ask that. So I don't have any Japanese blood in me per say. But through Egan, I got to keep his last name. And so I love- I love it. And he's a- he's an amazing friend and amazing person. Taught me so much about life and success. And if you want something and you want to be the best at something, you have to put time into it.

So you're born Fong, now what was your-

You want me to tell you my real- maiden name?

I've seen Fong associated with you, but-

That's just my middle name.

OK.

So my last name is Leary.

Leary.

L-E- and I never felt like me. I never liked that name.

Fong is your mom's-

-Umm, I think-

--name?

--it was my my grandmother's name. So Alice Fong Leary is how I was born. But Alice Leary never really had a good life. I'll just say it just never seemed to go my way. Even when I first came to Hawai'i and I was starting to do auditions. I never got anything as Alice Leary. I think I did- I counted it, like fifty-two auditions for different commercials and things and I never got it. Then as soon as it became Alice Inoue, everything changed. I did get a- that sort of started- and I think it's because in Hawai'i it was a familiar last name and it kind of integrated me a little bit better.

And you obviously feel comfortable with it because you- you're no longer married to Egan, but you keep it.

Yes. Yes. Yes. It's- it's- it- it really has worked well for me because I got involved in the Japan market working for Japan TV news. So it really match. And I also speak Japanese. So it just sort of matched. And I kept it. And I- I just I feel like Alice Inoue now.

You know, there is a time you were known by tens of thousands of people in Hawai'i, but they weren't necessarily local people. They were people seeing you in their hotel rooms.

Yeah!

And you were terrific. I saw you doing news on visitor- Visitor Television.

Yes, it was called- it was Japan TV news visitor, it was O'ahu visitors bureau television. We had these different uhh, shows that would air in twenty-eight thousand hotel rooms to all the visitors that came. So we did these daily newscasts about jellyfish or just different activities going on. So it was known much more to the visitors that came to Hawaii than people that lived here locally.

And then you besides being an anchor, then you went off and did a field reporting show where you were doing sports, and surfing.

Yeah! So that was our Fuji Television. So we wanted to show the visitors to Hawai'i that it's- there's so much to do. So we did something like 39 or 40 different things. Everything from scuba diving to skydiving to anything that you could do as an activity in Hawaii. I got to do it. So we called this sh- we called the show Do Sports. And that was really helpful to a lot of the businesses locally so that we could showcase the things that could be done in Hawaii that you might not have known about.

You've said that you're a- you're an introvert by nature, but all these things you're talking about really require the ability-

-Yeah.

--to present in front of people and bring it and- and depend on others for-

Mhmm.

--for your success, especially in television.

Yeah.

How do you-

Yeah.

How does that correlate?

So interesting. Like when I take any sort of test, if you- out of 30 questions, 29 out of 30, I'm more introverted. So I'm- I'm what you would call a learned extrovert. So by understanding that what I need is time alone, then I make sure that I have a lot of time alone. And when I say learned extrovert, it's Toastmasters. It's all these different ways to learn how to speak. I mean, people wouldn't believe it, but in college or all the way through college, I never once raised my hand in class to ask a question because I was shy. And uhh, it's the only reason that I can get up and do what I do is because I love the information that I've learned and I love nurturing people. And so I want to share information so that forces me to get up. And the more people I want to reach, the more confident I have to be in speaking to large groups. So it was- it's a- it was a learned expanse. And in fact, every single time I have to get up to talk, I go through a complete challenged internally to be able to to present.

Alice Inoue's career in tourist television and as an on camera talent and spokesperson for local businesses was flourishing in Hawai'i. Then an unexpected turn of events changed all that. And off she went on an entirely new life path.

During those years, I felt that I had really become successful in some way. I was busy filming every day. We're doing these shows and I had sponsorships from different companies, large companies that would pay me money. And it was wonderful. And I thought that this was the- this is who I am. This is what I do. I just introduced Hawai'i and I try to showcase Hawai'i to the- to the Japanese market and that I felt really good. And somebody uhm, gave me a gift certificate for an astrology reading. Now, I wasn't into it. Not my thing, but some gives you a gift certificate, you go. So I went and this- this man started telling me about myself. But my mind was like, well, you read that in the newspaper. I was on the cover of midweek. You read that there- so your mind doesn't let you believe it. And so anyway, he pulls out a bunch of data and this is in 1997 and he says in April of 19- of the year 2000 you're going to have a career change. You're gonna go on a career change because of this planet. So I was like, mm ok. Do you remember Palm Pilots back in the day?

Yes. Palm Pilots.

So I was very modern in 1997. I had a Palm Pilot. So I- I clicked forward three years and I wrote in there, astrologer says, Pluto changes my life. And I almost did it facetiously. Wrote it in there April of 2000. And I kind of put it away and forgot about it. Then as we got towards that time period, I started losing sponsors and losing shows and I was doing a variety of contracts and shows. But it was fine. I still had my full time job that Japan TV needs- news. And then they came in on April 1st of the year 2000. And my boss at the time said to me, Alice, we have good news and bad news. The good news is that we sold the company. Now, I didn't even know the company is for sale. Good news was we sold company. The bad news is they didn't purchase your- your little newscast. And so we're going to have to let you go so you can go get an employment. And so without the vehicle of television, nobody is gonna- I- sponsor. There's- it was pretty much my whole identity. I didn't- I didn't know who I was without television.

And blindsided-

-Yes, I had no idea.

--And not to have any warm up on it.

Yeah. So I remember going to unemployment. And as clear as day. Glass- you pull out a form and it says, how long did you work that? Right. You have to write down your work. And I turned on my Palm Pilot and the pop up came up that I had written three years ago that said that your life would go through a career change. And I just thought, oh, my God. And it was one of those moments literally where that chicken skin moment, that realization that this was destined. Kind of like it was so foreign to me. But all I knew was I made a commitment in that moment that I wanted to learn it. I want to learn how

to calculate somebody's life. I wanted to- because I felt safe in that moment, because I was scared of- what am I gonna do? Who am I?

But it felt better to believe that this was preordained.

Somehow, yes. So in that moment, I felt very like, wow, how do- how do you do this? And I was curious. I think that was it. I was very curious. So from- and from there unemployment, I went to Borders and I bought like four hundred dollars worth of like astrology. Like- and I was on unemployment. I had no work. So all I did was study. And that- that was like the birth. And that was literally 20- 20 years ago. Yeah, basically 20 years ago. And that started this whole new journey of wanting to understand the divine workings of human beings, of the universe, of life and why things happen. So that began this- this sort of segment of my life that I'm in now.

You also did feng shui?

OK, so the- the- the way it goes is like I started and I said, wow, how do you figure this out? So I started learning the- the- the- the- about astrology and cy- life cycles that say it's more about timing. When did- when do you move? When do you change jobs? When- when do you transition? So learning about life cycles. And then, well, the next thing, if the planets have something governing us, then what about your environment? So then I got into Feng shui. So I went to learn about feng shui. And once that- whenever I learn something, I delve so, so deep into it that I learn it and I embody it. And then I- I was- I was a astrology and feng shui consultant for a while. Then people would say, you know, I can't help it because I'm a Scorpio, or oh, I talk too much because I'm a Gemini. So people would give these excuses or they would say things like, I don't have money because my bathroom is in the wrong place. That kind of thing. And I started thinking, you know, no, it's not. You can't blame the planet, can't blame your environment. It's you. So then I got into life guidance, meaning how do we create our life? So, yes, the planets are there. There's a sun in the morning, the moon at night. Yes, our environment is there. If it's uncluttered, we probably feel better. But it's really up to you. And so that's how I moved into life guidance. And that's where I started discovering that we have so much more... Power over our lives than we think. Things don't just happen to us, they happen for us. And how do we look for the good in situations and how do we train ourselves to be able to kind of live a life that we want.

And you found answers for all of those things?

Kind of. I found answers that satisfied me. Yes. And then uhh- then I used whatever I've researched, whatever I've learned. I've read hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of books and spent thousands of hours studying. And I've come to understand that we- there- things do happen for a reason, if we can find that reason, because then we can move forward. So, yes, I feel like in my case, I found answers.

You know, I notice you're really keying in on, you know, why do things happen? When do they happen? How do we know?

Mhmm.

I'm just kind of looking back at your childhood, because so often what we do, we don't even realize that at the time. But umm, something happens in our childhood and-

Yeah.

--we- It really- it influences what we do later.

I'm living in places that didn't accept me. So if you're not accepted socially, what do you want to do? You want to be alone, right? So when you're alone, there's a lot of time and a lot of umm, things that you start to discover about yourself. And so what I- what I tell people too, is a lot of your purpose lies in what you used to love as a child, because sometimes as adults, we get into just doing what we have to do to make money, pay the mortgage. We kind of get into life and we do things because we have to. Not necessarily because we love it. And when we- when we're trapped into it, our life kind of gets a little bit dimmer. It's not as- it's not as fun. But if you go back to when you were a child, what are the things that you love to do. Uhh, I used to love solving puzzles. I used to love dissecting animals. Uhh, so I- all the things that I love to do as a child. I feel that I'm doing them now as an adult. So it- its-

But you did them as a child for a sense of escape or to make yourself happy.

Yeah. Because I just enjoy doing these things. I loved magic tricks. I loved- I just loved anything that I could do on my own. And I- I remember umm, wanting to, to help people. But if nobody likes you, nobody wants you to help them. Right? So I would put these uhh, kind of stuffed animals or figurines and I would pretend like I was their counselors or their- their- their guide. So I would premake these questions that they had for me and I'd put questions out of the hat and I would pretend like I was helping them in life. I wanted to be like a Dear Abby. I loved Dear Abby. I used to read that all the time. Living in Taiwan, we used to get some sort of American newspaper and she was in there. And used to love- And I always thought like, I want to be a Dear Abby.

And so interesting, so by feeling unaccepted, you resorted to your own devices to find out what cheered you up and-

Yes.

-satisfied you.

Yeah.

And that- that- that's a theme that remains to this day.

Yes. Because everything that I find and I do alone. And I- and I find it to be valuable to me. Or I want to come out and share it with you. So I feel like I've been interested in many, many different things. And because of that, I've learned a lot. In 2013, I uhh- and then I started writing books. I wanted to share what I learned at the end of the year with people. So I started writing books. So I- I had a plan. I wanted to do a book a year- book a year. And I got to my sixth year. I was going to write my sixth book. I couldn't seem to figure out what I was going to do and I couldn't move forward. And I asked myself, what do you really want to do? Because everything was going well. Many clients- I was speaking. I was- I had- I was doing fine in that business. And the answer came back. I just want to teach people to be happy. I just want to teach people to be happy. And in that moment of recognizing that, I had the idea, what if I could have a school, a school where didn't you learn- Where you learned all the things that you didn't learn in school.

Which you wish somebody would- So many things you wish somebody had told-

-Yes!

--you a long time ago. Someone, please.

Yes!

But you do find out by hard knocks later.

Later. So what if we could learn how to move through betrayal? What if we could learn resentment and guilt? And why am I feeling guilt? All of these emotional things that- and what is my purpose and why am I here? And how can this happen? What if we had a school that we could teach those things? So immediately I decided physical, mental, emotional and spiritual classes. Spiritual classes like what's my purpose? Umm, mental stress, overwhelm- emotional guilt, like all of these things. These are teachable. These are things that I've- I've learned that I can share. So that was my breakthrough. And I opened Happiness U in September of 2013. And so we have a location where people come and they learn these things. There are hidden blessings in everything, hidden benefits and everything. And if you can find the benefits and find the blessing, that's where you thrive. We find that silver lining. That's where we recognize that life is about growing.

At the time of this conversation, in the fall of 2019, Happiness U was still teaching its life lessons after seven years at its Kaka'ako classroom in Honolulu as well as online, mahalo to Inoue of Kaka'ako, O'ahu for sharing her life story with us. And thank you for joining us. For PBS Hawai'i. And Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha Nui.

You have a longtime relationship with another well-known person who is Alan Wong, the restaurant tour.

Yes.

So, of course, I want to ask you immediately-

Yes.

--what everyone must ask you. Who cooks at your house?

That is the number one question. I cook. I'm in charge in-

-You cook for Alan Wong?

--the kitchen. I do. I do. And he is one of the best people to cook for because he appreciates it. And in the 20 years that we have been together, he has never once said, why did you cook this this way, or this is overcooked. He's never done that. He's- he's a- he's just so appreciative. And so I get to keep the kitchen. That was the one thing we got together. I like cooking. I love cooking. I love nurturing people. And I thought, oh, my god, you're a chef. The only problem is like, what am I going to do? Like, I need a kitchen. He's like, you can have the kitchen.

For audio and written transcripts of all episodes, a 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.