

GUEST: BILL PATY

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You're almost ninety and a half, as we speak on this day in 2011, you're still going to Bishop Street every day. You're still working.

[CHUCKLE] Yeah.

When are you gonna quit?

[CHUCKLE] Well, I like to think that, my kids say, Grandpa, when are you gonna write your book? [CHUCKLE]

I'm too busy going to work.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE] Well, it's been a little bit that way.

Bill Paty fulfilled his boyhood dream of managing a sugar plantation when sugar was king in Hawaii. And that turned out to be just one chapter of his remarkable career. He's lived nine decades of Hawaii history, while devoting himself to taking care of his island home. Meet Bill Paty, next on Long Story Short.

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

***Aloha mai kakou.* I'm Leslie Wilcox. William Woods Paty, Jr. grew up in the Nuuanu district of Oahu in an era when he could ride the streetcar around town, and take the train to the North Shore. He graduated from Punahou School three years before the Pearl Harbor attack, and seventy years after, he's still working to care for the Hawaii he knew as a kid. In this edition of Long Story Short, we'll learn more about this well known *kamaaina's* life and work as an Eagle Scout, Ivy League student, World War II paratrooper, plantation manager, Constitutional Convention president, gubernatorial campaign manager, and State Land Director.**

What was Honolulu like when you were growing up?

Well, Honolulu has always been a special place, but especially then. Pre-war days, before World War II, and the streetcars ran, and we walked in and out, here and there. I think it was kind of a backed up, not slow motion, but a more gradual way of life. And the opportunity to get around easily on any part of the island was always there, and you just took it for granted. But we had opportunities to go bodysurfing at Makapuu, and these places. It was kind of a special time that you couldn't really ever duplicate again.

What were your hobbies as a kid?

Well, hobby-wise, the natural kind of things. Scouting was involved, and so I'd say hiking, camping, certainly going out and bodysurfing where you could. I kept pigeons.

And you've been a committed Boy Scout and Eagle Scout.

I was fourteen years old. And today, I'm the grand old man, I'm the Gray Eagle of the Council. [CHUCKLE]

At that time, what did you aspire to be?

Well, [CHUCKLE] I was always involved with getting into the sugar business. And of course, if you get in there, why, a plantation manager seemed like that's the place to be. And so, starting in my high school days, I used to work summertimes at the HSPA experiment station, and then I got into plantation summer jobs. And went away to school and took ag, and came back home and signed up with Waialua Sugar, and away we went. I was wired all the way through. [CHUCKLE]

Because sugar, and ag in general, were our industries then.

Sugar was the economic engine of the Territory at the time, and subsequently, really, the State. You couldn't go very far without getting involved with that. And so, it was a natural for someone like myself.

So when you were looking for a college coming out of Punahou, did you look for a college that was good at agriculture?

Well, not necessarily. Well, yes and no. Yale and Cornell and some of these schools had a strong alumni here. And so, some of the plantation managers, a couple of them were Cornell guys, and they all got together and prepared a four-year course for me by the subject, so that I had no choice but to just move right into it, and got out of it with a BS in agriculture.

And then, what was your first job out of college?

Well, the first sugar job I had was assistant agriculturalist. And it was right in line with my training, and the kinda job you get when you first come aboard. [CHUCKLE]

We'll catch up with Bill Paty's ag work later in the program. But first, we need to take a detour, as he put his career on hold to join the Army during World War II.

Tell us about, for example, landing at Normandy, or being a paratrooper right before the D-Day Invasion.

Well, I'd always wanted to get in the parachute troops, and right out of the ROTC at Cornell, I went down to Fort Benning and qualified and got accepted in the parachute troops. We trained our people and went over to England eventually, and earlier in the year in '44, jumping on D-Day into Normandy was [CHUCKLE] more than a unique experience. We dropped six miles further inland than we were supposed to, [CHUCKLE] and then on top of that, we dropped right on top of a German parachute regiment that had been training right in that area.

What happened when you landed?

I ran into a French milkmaid early on. D-Day morning, all this firing is going, and we've had skirmishes all night long from midnight. You could hear the big shells from the Navy cruisers offshore coming in. The Spitfires and all were all over the place. She's milking a cow in the middle of the hedgerow. And I walk over, and I go to give them my best Punahou French. [FRENCH LANGUAGE], which is supposed to mean, Where are the Germans around here? She doesn't say anything, she milks the cow. But she moved her head like this, and I looked, and there's a German patrol coming down the road just above us. [CHUCKLE] So I jump up, and jump back over the hedgerow. But I think I told my sergeant that I think I'm gonna get us a date tonight. [CHUCKLE]

Have a date with a German regiment.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE] But I got wounded subsequently. Yeah. And I became a POW, and that was a very humbling, frustrating experience for me. One of the worst things that could have happened, that I was taken out of combat while the great men I'd been training with all this time, and they're going on into combat without me. I never got over that for many, many years.

What were conditions like for you as a POW?

Nothing's good about being a POW. The Germans, in terms of handling their officers, POWs, were more lenient than they were with the enlisted. It could have been worse.

Did you worry that they'd kill you?

No, no, they were ...

Or torture you.

No, we didn't get any treatment like that. But if you tried to get away, they don't get very happy about that.

Bill Paty did try to get away, three times. The first time, German soldiers found him hiding in a French farmer's attic. The second time, he attempted an escape from a German hospital compound.

And what had you been treated for? What was your wound?

Oh, I had a Smizer bullet in my groin. It's still there, by the way. And they never took it out. But [CHUCKLE], be that as it may, I decided that we wanted to try to see if we could get out. We went out with blankets at night, and they had the watchtower, but the lights didn't go on all the time. And it gets kinda touchy there, because you're not sure if the lights gonna come on, they're gonna use the machine guns. So we got over, and it was getting close to dawn by then. So we got out, and we hightailed it off across the field. And I guess after we'd gone a few miles, we decided we'd better try to hole up. And so, we holed up in a cowshed, and again, a French lady came by, and we gave her our best, charming [CHUCKLE] Punahou French again. She said, No, wait, wait, wait, I'll get help. She comes back with four Germans and two police dogs.

So far, that Punahou French ...

Didn't work out too well. [CHUCKLE] But we got solitary time for that. Yeah.

Bill Paty eventually made it home to Hawaii. And after the war ended, he picked up where he had left off in his plantation career. Soon after starting as an ag assistant at Waialua Sugar, Paty received a promotion, prompted by the sugar strike of 1946.

The big unionization, the first strike of the sugar industry with the ILWU. The manager then was a guy by name of John Midkiff. He said, Hey, I got a job for you. I'll make you industrial relations director. That's a job that's human resources today. But it was interesting. I couldn't have done without it, looking back on it. You had a very militant union, as it turned out, both sides, the management and the union were new at how to get along with each other after all these years and years of the manager calling the shots. It was an experience that served me well down the road, because you learned how to work with people who had strongly differing opinions of what should be done.

And you felt comfortable with pretty much whoever you talked with. I live in Waialua, and I know from families in the area that you were the big cheese guy who always knew the names of all the kids, and the grandkids, and always asked about how somebody was doing. You knew people as people.

Well, I like to think so. You could not be in that country situation and not be surrounded by so many good people. And you knew their kids, and you were involved with the Little League, and the Pop Warner, and the churches, and they're all good, wonderful people. And if you weren't comfortable and happy in that kind of an environment in Hawaii, I don't know what would ever happen to you. That was a special time.

Who did you have oversight of?

Well, we had [CHUCKLE] everybody on the plantation. [CHUCKLE]

What was your management style?

I like to think I was a pretty good listener. I always say, You gotta be able to listen. Well, sure you do. But it's how you listen. You can pretend to be sincere, and nod away, and all that kind of thing, but people have a sense when you really want to hear what their thinking is, beyond what you think they think. If that's a style, I don't know if it's a style necessarily, but you're certainly not going very far down the road unless the people that you're talking with who don't share your viewpoints have a feeling that you are willing to hear what they are really thinking, not just on the surface, but down below.

It's fascinating to me that people in Waialua, where the plantation shut down, was it '95 or so, 1995, still refer to where they live as, I live in Mill Camp, I'm in Ranch Camp, I'm in Haole Camp.

Yeah, that's the designation of where you're from.

So how were they divided up? Was it mostly ethnicity?

Yes and no. People say they divided the people by nationality, more because they were more comfortable with each other, living next door to people that you'd been raised with and knew, and knew the customs. But it was, however, the way you determined somebody. Yeah, he used to live Ranch Camp long time, you know. [CHUCKLE]

It was a long time coming, the end of sugar in Hawaii. How did you feel when Waialua Plantation closed?

Oh, I had a heartache on the thing. I saw it coming, we knew it was coming. But you just kinda feel, gee, how fortunate we were to have that time in our lives when we had such a wonderful cohesion of opportunity in agriculture, and using those lands, and the people coming together, living together, playing together, never again to be repeated or duplicated in any way, so that we were just darn fortunate to be able to have that. So that while it was ... I hated to see it go, but that somebody's gonna graduate someday [CHUCKLE] and so, yeah, with sugar shutting down, it was kind of in the cards.

You decided to leave the sugar industry in 1984, I believe.

Well, I really didn't decide. Actually, I became sixty-five, and they didn't want me to stay any longer. So [CHUCKLE] that was the reason I left, although, I had been moved into a diversified arena that Castle and Cooke was trying to develop. And while I was in the middle of that, why, my retirement age came upon me. And so that was the reason I really left.

Bill Paty may have been ready for retirement in his employer's estimation, but not his own. In fact, his next career in politics and government was already well under way before he left Castle & Cooke. Six years earlier, he had presided over the historic State Constitutional Convention, a proving ground for future Hawaii leaders.

Let's talk about the 1978 Constitutional Convention. You're still working at Waialua Sugar, but you took time out and ran for office.

I took time out and ran for office, then went back into the sugar business. But that '78 Con Con was a marvelous opportunity again for me in terms of all the things that went into it. And as it turned out, even though the union was not supporting me, I pulled a pretty strong vote.

There were a lot of non-legislator, non-experienced politicians in the Con Con.

Oh, of a hundred and two, only four had held previous elective office. Period. But taking a hundred and two people, most of them with no real legislative background, except the very few that were elected, and say, Hey, we want you to look at the State Constitution, get yourself organized, develop the rules, develop committees, get the hearings going, and come up with recommendations all in terms of sixty actually working days. [CHUCKLE] The social dynamics of that by itself were highly exceptional in terms of the job that we wanted to accomplish. But we managed to do it, and we brought it out in the end with thirty-four amendments that we proposed to the general public,

and they all were approved. But it was not without a great deal of frustration and confrontation, which we could have done without, but nonetheless, that went with it.

That went with it.

Yeah.

How much did your experience dealing with diverse interests on a sugar plantation help you in this job?

Because I had been playing sugar politics, if you want to call it that, for a long time, because in '54 when the Democrats took over, the entrenched Republican business community suddenly had to shift gears and play on their side of the fence, the Democratic side of the fence. So when we got into the Con Con, these were people I knew, people understood me, and so I didn't come in as the brash plantation manager trying to push his way around. So that was kind of the way things worked out back then.

It could have worked against you, having baggage, but you must have acquitted yourself well as an individual.

Yeah, I tried to tell them. I remember standing up in front of the group and saying, Look, I've got too much mileage on me to be beholden to anybody. Well, they didn't all buy that, but that was my thrust of the thing, and basically, it was true. I had been down the road with the City and County, I knew the legislators thing, and uh, most of 'em kinda felt that I had the opportunity to be about as fair and balanced as they could find.

There hasn't been another Con Con since 1978.

I recognize that the Con Con was kind of special in terms of its influence on the long term structure of our State, and the management of our resources, the fiscal responsibilities that we have today. But at the same time, you can't ignore the fact that the Constitution is a living document, and in terms of the passage of time and in terms of where people are, it should be perhaps hauled out of the garage and washed up, and, hey, let's take a look at this car again and see how it's running. And I can't argue that. At the same time, there is a group that says, leave well enough alone. [CHUCKLE] If you bring a new group in there, no telling what they'll do. [CHUCKLE]

Yeah, how they'll fix it.

How they'll fix it. Yeah.

Six years after the Constitutional Convention, when Bill Paty reached the retirement age at Castle & Cooke, he had his eye on the top job at the Hawaii Sugar Planters' Association. But, as luck would have it, another political opportunity presented itself.

About that time, John Waihee also decided that he was going to run for governor, and came by and asked me if I'd join his team. And I got induced to [CHUCKLE] chair his campaign. We were longtime associates by reason of being in the Con Con together, and I had appreciation for his ability to do

things along the lines that I liked to see done. And we had never had an elected Hawaiian as a governor, and I thought, Gee whiz, this might be a strong opportunity. So I came aboard. John Waihee, I'd say, is a natural campaigner. He's friendly, outgoing, bright, and so he was easy to campaign with. And you could put him on some of these tough issues, and he came out with very sound positions on them, and people began to come in and behind it. And in the end, why, we were able to pull it off.

And you were appointed head of Department of Land and Natural Resources, which is one of the most challenging departments the State has.

[CHUCKLE] Yes, it was.

Land and water.

Yes, it was. Land and water, and all the natural resources, with the parks and the fisheries. It was a great, grand, frustrating in many ways, opportunity. But I must say, we were fortunate. For the most part, we had money. And I feel that today, it's a tough ticket when you don't have the funding to do the kind of work that needs to be done to improve and maintain our natural resources. Nothing usually came in your direction that didn't have someone who was very vocal and firm, and the water issues on one side, and the fisheries on the other.

You know, we talk about consensus. We're such a diverse society that there's always gonna be two or three, or four forces coming at you that don't agree with something that otherwise has a following. So how do you move forward?

Well, I think at some point, you just gotta say, Hey, we've given this our best thought, and we've put as much concern into it as we have, we have to make a decision, and much as I don't like to, we have to agree to disagree. And go from there.

And along the way, you married Peg, your high school sweetheart, had five children.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

What kind of life lessons are the ones that proved most important to you?

I think having fun, with your family and with your friends. Your memories are made of the good times for the most part. Giving thanks for having the opportunity to live and raise a family in this marvelous place we call Hawaii. We're privileged to be there. Everything that you've done in the past and so on, all comes together in terms of your *ohana*. And we've been fortunate to have a good, strong *ohana*, and have fun in the process. But again, feeling comfortable that your contributions along the way have maybe given a little bit of edge to making Hawaii a better place in which to live.

Interesting, 'cause your life is defined by hard work, with long hours. But what you say is, the important thing is the fun.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE] Oh, yeah. Everything is relative, but if you don't appreciate and understand, and take advantage of the great opportunity the Lord has given us, all the people around that have afforded us the friendships we've known, you're just missing some of the greatest things in life.

What do you think life's gonna be like for your great-greats?

I like to think that the essence of what we have in Hawaii will always be there. It's gonna continue to be a special place. It's going to continue to be like no other place in the world. It's gonna continue to be important to all of us that we manage and maintain our resources. But it's important that we as people in this blessed place come together when it is necessary to maintain what's so precious and so important about this place that we have here in Hawaii.

You're almost ninety and a half, as we speak on this day in 2011, you're still going to Bishop Street every day. You're still working.

[CHUCKLE] Yeah.

When are you gonna quit?

[CHUCKLE] Well, I like to think that, my kids say, Grandpa, when are you gonna write your book? [CHUCKLE]

I'm too busy going to work.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE] Well, it's been a little bit that way. My regret in some ways is that I don't have time to follow up with good friends. I get a note here, or email there. I don't follow up. And there are so many wonderful friendships that have collected dust. That's something that I'd like to see if I couldn't, in the time remaining, do a better job of taking a little shoe polish and walk around and say, Hi.

Wow, that's a very nice wish. You've mentioned several times, in the time remaining. I know you're in good health. I mean, driving around town, and you swim, but do you have a sense of time telescoping on you?

Yes. You'd be silly or foolish if you didn't. There are so many opportunities you have for [CHUCKLE] leaving tomorrow [CHUCKLE], for whatever happens to people at ninety or whatever. It compresses your feeling in terms of what you think you might be able to do, and what else should I try to do.

What do you think is your legacy, if you have to say one, that has the longest legs, or the biggest legs?

I would think possibly the conservancy and the management of our natural resources that keep our State in balance in terms of all the things that make us special. The ocean, the fisheries, the flora, fauna, the whole thing, I think. Trying to make sure that the lands that we have are properly maintained to the extent that we can, that we continue to try to see that the changes that take place in terms of land utilization remain under control, and that we don't just become another Mecca for a quick vacation fix, or another condo type thing. If they can't go to a lot of the places in the world today, why, they need to come back to Hawaii, and Hawaii is gonna be, I think, more and more attractive as a place to be and to recreate, and possibly to live.

So when I asked you, what would be your greatest legacy, I guess I was thinking of a position or a job. But what you did was, you picked a theme that has run through almost all of your career. I mean, from plantation manager, on through.

I think that's true. I think it's a river wandering downhill, but it's always the same river. So, whether you're really successful at it or not, but having had the opportunity to work with it, and have some influence on it can't help but hopefully be a positive factor in the long range what makes Hawaii special.

In 1992, Bill Paty became a trustee of the Mark A. Robinson Trust, and nearly twenty years later, in 2011, he continues in that job, managing trust assets, while also volunteering his time with nonprofit organizations. At age ninety, Bill is at least contemplating the idea of slowing down to spend more time with family. In the meantime, Bill Paty continues to build on his legacy of preserving the lands he's loved for so long, for future generations. For Long Story Short, and PBS Hawaii, I'm Leslie Wilcox. *A hui hou kakou.*

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit pbshawaii.org.

I want to try to be sure that such time is available. [CHUCKLE] I would not want to go down the wrong road, feeling that I had overlooked it.

Do you feel like that sometimes?

Yes. I feel that I'm too busy trying to do all these things, and take care of the Army here, and come to the Legislature at their request, and go to a charity performance, let the Boy Scouts come over here, and all of this. They say, Hey, come on, Bill, you've served your time, kick back, enjoy. Yeah.