

GUEST: KIRK MATTHEWS AND LINDA COBLE

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MATTHEWS: I was doing a morning show, noon show, evening show. And so, when she got there, that was wonderful. And the fact that she was a delicious babe made it all the better.

COBLE: What do you mean, was?

[CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: Is.

Ooh ...

COBLE: [CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: Was and is. But I fell in love with her from the very first time I saw her.

You know them in front of the camera and at the microphone. On this edition of Long Story Short, my former TV news colleagues, Kirk Matthews and Linda Coble reveal their personal story behind all the stories they've covered in their long careers.

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. In this edition of Long Story Short, Linda Coble and Kirk Matthews are among the most recognizable couples in Hawaii due to their decades in local broadcast news. Linda is known as the first female TV reporter and anchor in Hawaii, and Kirk has been on Hawaii's airwaves longer than almost any other local TV newscaster working today. Kirk and Linda have a lot in common, beginning with a date in history, January 10, 1947.

MATTHEWS: We were born on the same day, in the same year, which may explain part of that. Linda, amazingly, has become ten years younger than I am over time.

[CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: But she was born on the East Coast, I was born on the West Coast, and we figured we were two little stars shot down from Heaven, and we ended up together.

People who've worked with you a long time, have been your friends for a long time, they often comment on how alike you are. How are you alike, would you say?

COBLE: We are alike. We don't argue. This is really weird. We never get mad at each other.

Oh, now, you're not one to back down from an argument. It would seem like you would argue.

COBLE: Never.

Really?

COBLE: Really. I don't think we ever get mad at each other, ever. We agree on a lot of things. He is very flexible. I'm the one that's doing weird things at weird times. The fact that he goes to bed like a baby at seven-thirty at night is a lot of fun in a relationship, but I don't complain.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: And he has to get up at two-thirty in the morning, and I don't mind him rolling out of the bed with the alarm blasting. Bye-bye, Honey. And then I have to go back to sleep, which is really easy.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: But we never argue.

VIDEO: It is now five twenty-five, almost five twenty-six on this Wednesday morning. Wall Street—

It's an unnatural shift that you have.

MATTHEWS: It is odd; it is odd. You know that, more than anybody.

And you never get used to it. And you're still doing it, Kirk, after how many years?

MATTHEWS: Gosh, I don't even know. How many has it been; twelve, thirteen years on this go-around? Twelve years, maybe? You know, off and on before then.

And I know what while Linda may go back to sleep at two-thirty, she watches you on the air. Because when you were on the air and I was on the air at the same time, she watched what we did. She knew what was on every stage of the game.

COBLE: I think it's a responsibility of a partner to know what's going on. And then, we're in the same profession, which makes it very easy. He can come home and talk to me about what happened during the day, and I understand it. If you were a lawyer, forget about it. [CHUCKLE] I wouldn't know. You know what I mean? And I think that partnership profession helps in the after-work experience. I understand what he's saying, he understands and respects my feedback. So that's neat. So of course, I watch.

So you claim you don't argue. Is there something you agree to disagree on, where you just don't talk about it?

MATTHEWS: Yes. And it's exactly that. There are days when I send her a little note and say, When I get home, I know you will want to talk about this. We are not going to. I love you.

But do you ever talk about it, then?

MATTHEWS: Yes, we do. Of course, we do. But—

COBLE: He can't shut me up.

When you talk about firsts in broadcasting, you see Linda Coble's name locally. And I think you have some national firsts, too. But people who watch TV news now, and who hadn't before, probably don't realize how rare it used to be to ever see a woman on TV news.

COBLE: When I graduated from the University of Oregon in Portland, ready to look for work, knocking on the door of every TV station in Portland, the fellow at the station where I ended up working at in Portland told me, Come back when you've had more experience and a sex change operation. He actually said that. He would be fired today for having, said something that horrible. But it crushed me. There really weren't that many women in

television across the country. And when I got here to Hawaii and got a job as a newsroom secretary the day they landed the man on the Moon in 1969, Jim Manke gave me the job over at Channel 4, I felt so proud to have been able to crack that one little curtain open.

Newsroom secretary.

COBLE: Newsroom secretary. And then from then on, I was taking Tim Tindall's dirty suits to the cleaners [CHUCKLE], making sure the ties were hung up nicely, and the film in those days was swept off the floor, and answering the phone. And it didn't take long for me to start doing stories, and then anchoring. And we were the first women here, anyway, and a few others around the country, and we made it into Newsweek Magazine in 1971.

How did the men receive you in the newsroom?

COBLE: Very well. I was so proud. What a team. Al Michaels was our sports guy.

Wow!

COBLE: And Don Rockwell, and Tom McWilliams, and ...

MATTHEWS: Ken Kashiwahara.

COBLE: Ken Kashiwahara. I mean, I could go down the line of these wonderful journalists. Bart Fredo; I used to peek over his shoulder in every story he had, but he never got huhu about it. It was okay. And I was learning every day.

Well, so then, you worked for Bob Sevey, who was on record saying, you know, A woman works in this newsroom over my dead body.

COBLE: He said, A woman doesn't have a credible voice.

Not authoritative enough.

COBLE: Yeah. So, I thought, and then, he realized that we were spanking his butt, and he said, Okay, I'd better get her over on our side.

When you say that, Linda, what you mean is ...

COBLE: Ratings were doing very well. That's what I mean.

So, he wanted you as somebody who could attract an audience.

COBLE: Yeah; exactly. And he was very, very gracious, and I worked my way up.

VIDEO: I knew Waikiki when this avenue was two ways, when you could still see the beach from here, and The Jungle wasn't concrete.

The Sevey newsroom had seventy-five percent of the market watching. There was no cable out there, and the other stations had small audiences. So, I mean, everybody knew who Linda Coble was.

Linda Coble knew she wanted to be a reporter all along, and majored in broadcast journalism. But Kirk Matthews originally planned to become a teacher, like his father.

MATTHEWS: I went to Oregon College of Education, it was called then, and I had every intention of becoming a teacher. But it was the turbulent 60s, and one thing led to another, and I ended up with just a general studies degree, major in English and minor in political science.

When you say one thing led to another, it wasn't—

MATTHEWS: Well, let me just put it this way.

—long-haired protests and arrests, was it?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was, okay?

COBLE: He had hair down to here.

MATTHEWS: I was a ... hippie guy.

COBLE: Hippie-dippie.

MATTHEWS: And served my country. [CHUCKLE] And then, when that was done, like Linda, went knocking on doors in Portland, said Here I am, and they said, Go to a small town and get some experience. And I did. I went to Coosbury, Oregon, which isn't tiny-tiny, but there was a fellow there who had just bought a radio station and didn't know one thing about radio, and I knew just that much more, because I'd worked at the college radio station in Portland. And so, he and I just started in, and six months later, I ended up back in Portland for Public Radio for a year and had my own report on Public Radio, and then worked for Public Television for a year.

What'd you do for Public Television?

MATTHEWS: We had a program on four nights a week, an hour-long program called Feedback. We thought that was pretty hot stuff back then. And it was hip; it was like four young Turks. We did everything; produced, directed, shot our own video film, did live interviews, had call-ins, and we were just pretty radical for the day. This was 1970, I think, '71. And did that for a year. It was in black and white.

And were you climbing the ladder? Were you looking for the bigger market?

MATTHEWS: Well, that came along a little later. I got a job at the NBC affiliate in Portland for a couple three years. And then, like every young person, you know, Oh, what's next? San Fran, Seattle, Los Angeles. I had a couple of offers, but nothing, you know, really appealed. So, just hung out in Portland, worked at different TV stations. But my fun time was at KOAP, Channel 10.

COBLE: You told me your fun time was with me and Channel 9.

MATTHEWS: That was the most fun time.

[CHUCKLE]

Had Linda Coble stayed at KGMB, she might never have met Kirk Matthews. But in 1981, she moved back to Oregon, where she was raised, to spend some time with her family.

COBLE: When I was working at KGMB, my dad died, and Sevey, Bob Sevey, our boss, said, There's a space at the CBS affiliate in Portland. They never had a woman anchor, so maybe you can go and do that. I'll hold your chair for you, if you want. And so, he let me go. And this was '81, and there I went to Portland. Walking through the parking lot to the TV station, you know, this hair blond and tan, you know, co-ed looking. Stumble into this parking lot, ready to go up to the newsroom to have my interview, and uh, this man with a tweed jacket with leather patches and—

Kinda professorial.

COBLE: Yeah, very. Smoking a pipe, leaning against the wall. And he said, Are you from Hawaii? Are you the woman that's going upstairs? I said, Yes, I am.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: And he said, I just want you to know that the women reporters upstairs don't like you already; they wanted the job you're getting. And he said, Your co-anchor makes X-amount of money. He's going down a list. And I'm saying, Why are you telling me all this? And he said, You're taking my job. And that's how I met Kirk. That was Kirk.

Wow!

COBLE: In the parking lot.

How do you do.

COBLE: [CHUCKLE] Oh, God. And we—well, I can't say the punch line of that one.

MATTHEWS: No, you can't.

COBLE: [CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: No, not on PBS, not on any television station, as a matter of fact. On cable, you could say the punch line, but not here.

Well, this runs on cable too.

MATTHEWS: That's true.

[CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: Well, we won't go there. The fact is that ... I fell in love with her the very first second I saw her. The very first second.

That was the way you made your impression on her, by scaring her and intimidating her and—

MATTHEWS: I wasn't trying to scare her, I was telling her about the culture of the newsroom, and what to expect, and giving her a head start.

COBLE: And why are you telling me all this, because you're taking my job. I mean, that was shocking. But it wasn't the truth.

MATTHEWS: That was not the truth.

COBLE: He was just teasing.

MATTHEWS: The fact was that I was holding the chair until she got there. I mean, I was working from six in the morning 'til six at night as a co-anchor for the evening show. I was doing a morning show,

noon show, evening show. And so, when she got there, that was wonderful. And the fact that she was a delicious babe made it all the better.

COBLE: What do you mean, was?

[CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: Is.

[CHUCKLE] Ooh ...

COBLE: [CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: Was and is. But I fell in love with her from the very first time I saw her.

COBLE: It took me a while.

Linda Coble and Kirk Matthews were newsroom colleagues at KOIN in Portland for about a year before they became a couple. But the romance did not help Linda get over her other love, for the islands.

COBLE: I got so homesick for Hawaii. I mean, I would sit on the treadmill and listen to the Brothers Cazimero playing music on my headphones, and I'm sobbing. And finally, I told Sevey, I need to come back, can I come back? And he said, Yeah, you can come back. Can I bring somebody? What do you mean? And I said, Well, I'm in love; can I bring Kirk? Meaning, can he come to work as well.

MATTHEWS: She came over in April of '83, I came over in September, and every day, I would drive her to work. And every day, I would stick my head in the office of Sevey and say, Got anything yet? And he would say, Are you still here? And that went on for six weeks. In fact, for those six weeks, my main job was going down to Chun Hoon Market and lifting five-pound bags of Hinode rice off the top shelf for little old ladies. They would tug on my sleeve and say, Haole man, can you get Hinode rice?

[CHUCKLE]

MATTHEWS: Yes, ma'am. Put it down on the shopping cart like that. And I'm thinking, Good enough, I'll do it as long as I can do it.

And I suppose, you weren't gonna be applying at other TV stations.

MATTHEWS: Yeah, that was just out of the question at that time. At that time, it was out of the question. That was where I wanted to be, that's the girl I wanted to be with, and quite frankly, Sevey was the boss I wanted to work for then.

COBLE: He didn't trust any man with me.

Oh, that was it. It wasn't a professional deal. Did he have a job he could open up?

COBLE: Yeah, eventually, he started a reporter job at ten o'clock news. They never had one. And so, he started doing that.

VIDEO: Updated world stories via satellite. Linda Coble offers—

Both of you were very influenced by Bob Sevey.

COBLE: M-hm.

How so, and were you influenced in the same ways?

MATTHEWS: Probably me, a little less so than Linda. I came to work there a little later in my career, and Linda had been under his mentorship for a lot longer. But he was a very big stickler for facts and fairness. If there's one side, there's gotta be another side. And if there is, you better bring it.

COBLE: We all used to sit in his office at the end of our day. We wouldn't, you know, run home and go eat. We stayed and watched our competition on a totem pole set of three TV sets.

While he was anchoring the news.

COBLE: While he was anchoring.

And your reports were on.

COBLE: That's correct. We all sat in that room. We crowded in to see how we did, how that compared. And I think that was part of Bob's inspiration, to give us pride in what we did, and to be really aware of what our competition was doing, and see that that would make a difference in the quality of our airtime. That never happens now. People are just out the door the minute, you know, the bell rings.

MATTHEWS: Well, and there's five hundred channels on, too.

COBLE: That's right.

At the time you started in local television news, news was a loss leader. It was truly a public service. And lo and behold, the faces in the newsroom became the icons of the station, and the newsrooms became huge revenue generators. So the business changed, it became much more entertainment-oriented, we're gonna use this to attract a following. So, you got to see that change. And I think it required different skills, too.

COBLE: Yup; it did. And if you didn't keep up with them ... bye.

So, both of you were good at keeping up with what was required over years in a changing dynamic television news business.

COBLE: And it was really fun when I went to Perry and Price in '88, to be able to go and have a little bit more freedom to say what I wanted to say. With them, it was okay. But that was the first time. I can say, 1988 was the first time I ever shared my own opinion on a public airway. And that was because I was with Mike and Larry, and not with Sevey. And it was a different environment.

You've really gone different ways. You've stayed in the business as it's changed, sometimes gritting your teeth. And Linda's made forays back into it at times, but you've actually been very resolute in remaining a volunteer.

COBLE: Yeah; I've been very lucky. And that's part of the joy of being a public figure. When you're on television, you can't help but have your face out there, and people recognize you, they trust you. And if you have followed through in your personal life well, as well as your professional life, then you are of value to an organization, and you can pick and choose. And it's been wonderful. You know, everything from the prevention of child abuse, Rotary and all the wonderful projects and things that they do, and um, family programs, Hawaii Foster Kids.

But you didn't commodify yourself. I don't mean anything by this, but you chose not to represent a company or make money, you didn't trade in the public recognition.

COBLE: I haven't made a cent.

MATTHEWS: [CHUCKLE]

COBLE: I haven't made a cent since I left. Only when there were pregnancies at the TV station would I be able to go in and work three months during their maternity leave. And then, Kirk got fired of getting everybody preg—nah.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: Nah, nah, nah. And so, that was it. I'd go in and have a wonderful time, but that is the only money I've made since.

MATTHEWS: When in 1998, the last gig happened, we came to kind of a crossroads. And there was an opportunity for Linda to move up in the ranks of Rotary International, and it cut our income in half. There were two of us, and then there was one. But we agreed that we could do that. And I want to say this in the nicest way possible. She would be my community service; she would do what both of us could do if we had the time and the resources. We only had some of the resources, so she gave her time. And I've never been sorry; not one single minute.

So, what was it like breaking into the top ranks of the Rotary here?

COBLE: Wonderful. What?

MATTHEWS: I was gonna say, when we had to go this international assembly, there's like five hundred twenty-five districts around the world, and with only twenty-five women, most of the district governors were men. Which meant most of the spouses were women.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: And then, he'd have to go to breakout sessions and learn how to sculpt ice, make ice sculptures and—

MATTHEWS: Fifty ways to tie a scarf. Things like that.

COBLE: He was in this group. There were twenty-five men in that room of five hundred and fifty.

And you attended those scarf sessions?

MATTHEWS: You bet.

COBLE: Had to.

MATTHEWS: You bet. I sure did. I'll show you right here.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: It's a partnership. You know. If he had said, Honey, we need the money, come on, I would say, Okay, all right, I can do it, I could go down and welcome diners to Assagio, or whatever I wanted to do. That's no problem.

MATTHEWS: We came to this decision together.

COBLE: To be able to take that image or reputation, or faithfulness to the community into what you do outside of work. I think that's one of our biggest blessings. Don't you think? That we can translate what respect we garnered over the years into service above self, away from making the money, but still being able to contribute. And with Kids Voting, for example, since 1995, we'd been trying to teach the civic responsibility of voting for the kids. And just to see young people growing into that, I'm so proud. And the reason I can get into schools and help is because the teachers remembered me, and they trust.

Well, you know, I know this since I've worked with him. I know that if a school will call up and say, We need somebody to help with our Read Aloud Program, Kirk will say, A school? Great.

COBLE: I'll be there.

Tomorrow?

COBLE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: Are they little people? Good. I can read little people books. I do that well.

COBLE: All the time. I get so nervous. You know, I never used to be nervous. When you go into a newsroom, you don't know what to expect. You know, every day is different. You walk in, and you're ready once you get set down and get an assignment, and go, or think something up. In volunteer work, it never stops. And it builds, and the nerve wracking, oh, god. I get fast-beating heart over responsibilities. So, yeah, I think it's scary.
[CHUCKLE]

And now, you would seem to be the higher strung partner in this team relationship.

COBLE: Why do you say that?

[CHUCKLE] Well, now, but I wonder if that's true. I mean, behind your ...

COBLE: Closed doors?

—serene countenance, is there a lot of Type A action?

MATTHEWS: I'm not sure it'd be Type A. A-minus, maybe. You and I have worked together for a long time. Have you ever seen me get really, really mad? Maybe once.

I think for you, I have. I mean, but you have to say, Well, that's Kirk's style of anger. Because it's very gentlemanly. You don't ever put people on the spot, or make them feel bad.

MATTHEWS: I try not to. And she's not really high strung. She's blond.
COBLE: [CHUCKLE]

I think that might be some kind of ... some kind of law against that kind of remark.

MATTHEWS: Sue me.

[CHUCKLE]

COBLE: I was blond.

[CHUCKLE]

In looking back, Linda Coble and Kirk Matthews both count parents among the most important influences in their lives.

COBLE: My father walked out of the house when I was five. He left. He had an alcohol problem, and he and Mom no longer decided they wanted to be with each other. So out he goes. I held the door.

Did you feel abandoned?

COBLE: I didn't. Because Mom never made it out that way. And she worked, and we had terrific babysitters. And after seven or eight years of that, she found someone else, and fortunately, they got married and happy, and so I had a brother. So, I really think my mom gave me the strength, and my sister as well. Gave my sister the talent, the artistic talent. Gave me the strength to weather things and storms and ... yeah. And that stays with you forever.

MATTHEWS: Her mom was a go-getter. And she lived with us for a while in her later years. Georgia Lee. She was a heck of a gal.

COBLE: Everybody has some part of the heredity in there that's forming them.

So, with you, your mom gave you resilience?

COBLE: I think she did. And she gave me patience, and she taught me how to Fight back.

What about you, Kirk? Who was your most influential person in your life?

MATTHEWS: Oh, the old man. He died real young. But he was a teacher and a coach. He liked small schools, so that he could have a one-on-one with as many students as possible. But he was a straight shooter. He never lied, never beat up anybody. But he was tough. I mean, he was in World War II, the greatest generation, and swam around in the Pacific after a boat was shot out from under him for a while. He was a tough cookie, but he was funny as heck. Here's a good story. We had a track team at this tiny little school, and I liked pole vaulting because you don't have to run very far, and the girls thought it was really glamorous, and so that was my event. And he said, That's fine, but everybody has to do at least a couple, so you'll run the eight hundred, what was back then called the eight-eighty, two laps around the track. It sounded like a lot. So, I would, you know, jog every day. And so then the big meet comes, bang goes the gun, off these guys take like they're chasing somebody. And I'm the last guy, and I run, trying to catch up, and my lungs are burning, and my legs are lead. Finally get around the two laps, and I manage to pass two other guys. I collapse on the infield, and he comes over, and he's laughing, big smile on his face. And he's looking down at me. I said, Why are you laughing? I came in fifth. And he said, Think about all the kids that didn't get to run today. That was pretty potent stuff, and I've always remembered that.

COBLE: M-hm, that's right.

What's your hope for the future of journalism?

COBLE: That Kirk keeps working for two more years. [CHUCKLE] I hope that people calm down a bit, and don't feel that they have to entertain me. I'm there to watch the news.

COBLE: That Kirk keeps working for two more years. [CHUCKLE] I hope that people calm down a bit, and don't feel that they have to entertain me. I'm there to watch the news. I want to be able to hear it when I'm in the bathroom, I don't want a lot of banter, I want to know the headlines. And then when I come out of the room into the kitchen, I want to still keep aware of what's going on, even though I can't focus um, on the five, six, ten news. Um, I—I hope there's a little toning down of the energy and a little upbringing of ... delivery of what's important, and not conversation. That's my hope.

MATTHEWS: It's gonna be—it's gonna be interesting. I mean, it's—it's interesting already to see what's been going on. And we talked about social media a little bit. Uh, my—

COBLE: That's—

MATTHEWS: Just because it shows up on your Smart Phone, doesn't make it true. So, I think if I want to be entertained, I'll play the ukulele. You know. I just kind of worry about the whole personality-driven part of journalism. And I see there's probably a place for it, but ...

COBLE: There is a place for it.

MATTHEWS: As Jack Webb used to say, Just the facts, ma'am, just give me the facts. Information is not knowledge, and knowledge is not wisdom. You have to go through all those different paths to get to wisdom. And I would hope that we can help society at large and individuals achieve some wisdom.

As I'm speaking now in early 2013, Kirk Matthews and Linda Coble have been married for nearly twenty-nine years. Kirk continues to co-anchor the morning news on KHON2. Linda remains very active as a volunteer in Rotary and other charities, and she chairs Kids Voting Hawaii. 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.

MATTHEWS: One of the main questions I get, because this is Hawaii, is why I wear a coat and tie. And Joe Moore and I have had this conversation, more than once. And we both agree that when you are invited into somebody's house, that as a sign of respect you dress up, you dress the part. And that's what we do.