

GUESTS: RACHEL AND LORRAINE HAILI

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I know that there's other native Hawaiian business owners out there, but our claim to fame is that we've been in business for over sixty years. And my mom and dad always stressed that you're Hawaiian, you and your sisters are Hawaiian, and you need to make us proud.

Food keeps us connected with our cultural traditions, and an enduring example is the culinary legacy of Haili's Hawaiian Foods. Rachel Haili and Lorraine Haili Alo, 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, and welcome to Long Story Short. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Since the 1950s, Haili's Hawaiian Foods has made mouths water for steaming *lau lau*, chicken long rice, *poi*, and delicious *poke*. Founded by the late Rachel Ching Haili and husband, Peter Davis Haili, the family-run enterprise continues to offer authentic and hard to find traditional Native Hawaiian dishes. Growing up in this Hawaiian-Chinese family meant that every family member was expected to contribute their time to help with the family business, located at the Ala Moana Farmer's Market across from where Ward Center stands today. The second generation of Haili's to take over the business are Rachel Haili and her sister, Lorraine Haili Alo. They're Daughters Number 4 and 5 from a family of six girls. They credit the continuing success of the business to family teamwork, determination, and the business savvy inherited from their mother.

Yeah; my father was the silent partner. Whatever my mother said, it was, Oh, okay, honey.

My mother was pure Chinese, and my father was pure Hawaiian. So, you had these opposite personalities. My father was happy-go-lucky, and very outgoing. My mother was outgoing too, but in a different way. And my mother was very task-oriented. But they were both very family-oriented. Like, even though they were busy working, they always made time for us on Sundays. We'd all get into our station wagon. We had one of those green banana station wagons.

It was a Woody.

A Woody; yeah. [CHUCKLE]

With the wood panels.

Green, with wood panels. So, our job was, while they were working in the morning, we had to get baskets of clothes ready, baskets of food ready, so by the time they came home, we loaded everything up and we went to our auntie's house in Kaaawa. And we'd spend the day there with our cousins. We'd go on a boat to catch squid.

Was the squid for the restaurant, or for fun?

For the store. [CHUCKLE]

Oh, so you were gathering supplies.

We were just talking about that. I remember being in the boat with my dad, my younger sister and I, and he'd have the squid box. And we'd be sitting in the boat watching him dive down there. And we were like five, six years old, we don't really know how to swim, but we're in the boat with our dad, and we're just kinda looking over, watching him go down for squid and come back up with it. And you know, it was these long tentacles moving around. Yeah.

To make squid *luau*.

And raw squid.

Raw squid.

Back then, yeah, it was a lot of raw squid. And then, we'd have to learn how to dry it too, so we'd have to learn to pound it. So, even though we enjoyed the beach a lot, we also had to learn to go pick *limu*. Because that was another thing we needed for the store.

The store went seven days a week, so we never really had family vacations, how people would pack up and fly, and go somewhere, go to the outer islands. It was always a Sunday outing with our parents, so we never really felt like we were being deprived. Because my mom and dad always had time for us. I remember my mother and father taking us to, like, roller derby and wrestling on Wednesday nights. We did a lot of fun things. My mom would just close the business down at five o'clock in the afternoon, be home in time. She'd call us

and say, Okay, we're going to wrestling tonight, or we're going to the roller derby.

Oh, how fun.

If you want to go, have the rice cooked.

Live action.

Yeah; yeah.

At the Civic Auditorium?

Civic Auditorium.

They used to have the football games at the stadium over on Isenberg. Back then, we had to make our *lauau*'s at home. So it was the same thing. My mother said, You folks have to get everything ready, because before we can go to the football game, we have to make all the *lauau*'s. So, after school, we'd come home like on a Friday night. Okay, you set the tables up, you start washing the *luau* leaves, you start cutting the pork.

How many did you have to make?

Five bags of taro leaves every --

That's a lot.

You know, that's like twenty-pound bags. So, that's a hundred pounds --

Wow!

-- of taro leaves that we'd have to --

And back then, you had to peel all the taro leaves too. So, it was like, Okay, we gotta get organized or we can't go to the game.

Your reward was the game. Did you resent doing all that work?

No, 'cause we had to do it.

It was just part of -- that was us, that was part of what we needed to do.

And it was fun too, because we'd have friends come over and help us. We'd have our cousins come over and help us.

And aunties, and everybody knew their --

And we had cake afterwards.

-- position at the table.

And so, what happened on school days? I mean, you went to Kamehameha, and you went to Punahou and Kamehameha, right?

On school days, my sister Carol and I, it was after school, we got on the bus and we went straight down to Ala Moana Farmer's Market. And we needed to be there -- when we were teenagers. When we were little, we went to school right across the street from our house. We grew up on Gulick in Kalihi. And we'd come home, and we'd have to do our chores at home. Take care of the dog, sweep up the yard, get the garage ready because everybody's gonna come home and make *lau lau*'s tonight, and we'd have to have the rice cooked. We had chores to do.

And then later, you would go to the store.

Later, yeah. Later, when we were teenagers, we didn't have time to participate in club sports, or do things after school on campus. We just needed to get down to the store to help our mom and dad close up, clean up.

It was very clear that it was a family enterprise.

Oh, yeah.

And everybody got counted in.

Right.

And Saturday and Sundays, there wasn't any beach time or hanging out time with your friends. I needed to be at work.

And that was life? You didn't say, Just one time, I want to go hang out at --

Oh, we tried. [CHUCKLE]

Didn't work?

It didn't work. [CHUCKLE]

Well, when I was boarder at Kamehameha Schools, so I lived on campus. And then Saturdays, I got to come out for the day. And I went to the market and worked, because that was what I was supposed to do. And I didn't resent it. It was good. And then, plus, I was like, really popular because I got to go out and bring all the food in to my friends who didn't go out from the outer islands. So, it was no resentment. It was fun.

The Haili family's first business venture was a bar and grill called Family Inn. As the matriarch watched her family grow, she decided a liquor business was not an appropriate setting for her daughters. In the late 1940s, she started a fish market that evolved into something else. Established in the 1950s, Haili's Hawaiian Foods became a kind of second home for the Haili family, and a fixture at Ward Farmer's Market. Among the many vendors offering an array of food items, Haili's specialized in traditionally prepared Hawaiian cuisine, and it was one of the first places to offer poke to go.

My father's specialty was *aku*, because he was Hawaiian. Way back when, *aku* was like a rubbish fish. People didn't eat that; that was like the lowest thing, and it was very cheap. So, he specialized in that, because he learned to do all the different things, like dry it, make it raw, or they could fry it. So, before, you couldn't go to the store and buy one pound of *poke*; you had to buy the whole fish. And then, the vendor would clean it for you, and they'd prepare it how you wanted. So we'd have this lady come in from Waimanalo every week. She'd buy three twenty-pound *aku*'s, and that was for her family for the whole week. And she'd say, Okay, cut one *aku* for me for frying. So he'd cut it all into steaks. And then the other *aku*, I want you to cut for drying. So he'd have to cut it. And then she said, And then make me *poke* on the last *aku*. Well, my father got to where he was so busy, we couldn't keep up, and so we had to learn how to clean fish. Then, he figured out, well, let's just pre-make some of these things. So, he'd have a batch of fish already cut in chunks, so people could come in and say, Okay, I just want *poke*, I don't want fish for drying this week. That's how it kind of evolved. And then, people would say, Oh, I want my *poke* made with *shoyu*.

And so, that wasn't available other places at that time? 'Cause now, we see it in --

It's so common.

In every supermarket, grocery store, anyplace.

We'd buy all these different other kinds of fish, and he'd say, Okay, make some of that for *poke*. And we're like, Oh, you can eat this for *poke* too? And he'd say, Oh, yeah, the old Hawaiians, this is how they ate it. You put a certain kind of *limu*. The combinations with the fish were different. So we had to learn how to do all of that. But nowadays, most people just eat the *aku* and the *ahi* and the swordfish. But back then, you did the *oio*, the *awa*, you know, the *uhu*. And so then, he'd have to learn how to do all these different things. Like save the liver from the *uhu* to mix in with your *poke*.

When I was little, I would watch my dad clean the *aku*. And then, he'd save the head for *aku palu*. And back then, people would use the eyeballs of the fish, and the stomach and the intestines, and the heart of the *aku*, and the liver. And I would be like, How can anybody eat that? [CHUCKLE] But anyway, all along the intestines, there would be like, little ... pockets of the fat of the fish. And that was a delicacy. And my dad would take the time to clean it, and just slide all of that out. And he would keep it in a jar in the refrigerator, and he'd only bring it out when his good really, really good friends came, which was Pops Pahinui, and all of the guys from, Refuse. They would be off of work early in the morning, and they'd come over and they'd talk story with my dad, and he'd bring out this jar of fish guts.

And they would love it.

Yeah, they would love it. And they'd be playing music out in the back, and my father would be sneaking out in the back. And my mom is like, Where's your father? [CHUCKLE]

And at the time, was Gabby Pahinui a renowned ...

No.

No.

-- slack key guitar guy?

No, not yet.

And singer.

He was already, a known --

With the locals and his friends, he was like the person they all *paina*'d with, and stuff.

But he hadn't gone viral yet.

He didn't go viral yet.

Wow. Who else came to the shop, that other folks would know?

Auntie Lena Machado. Well, my father's grandaunt is Clara Inter Haili, also known as Hilo Hattie. And she was always there at the store, coming by to say hello.

What did she like to eat?

Everything.

Ake was her favorite.

What is ake?

It's raw liver; raw beef liver. And we'd have to flush all of the blood out, and then you de-vein it. Then you salt it, and you mix it with *kukui* nut and some *limu*, and chili pepper, and you ate it like that. So somebody's really Hawaiian if they can eat *ake*.

That's a lot of work, too.

Yeah, it is.

It's very time consuming.

De-veining it.

Yes, it's all done by hand, so ... my mother was an expert at that.

Do you still do that?

M-hm.

Yes.

You still do that at the shop?

We still do that; yes.

Wow ...

There's no machine that does that. [CHUCKLE]

And how many people ask for it?

A lot. There's a lot of people that come in and ask for it. That's one of our specialties that we still do.

Because a lot of people don't serve it anymore.

No.

Because of the labor.

It's a lost art, actually. Not even my children know how to do it.

We make *loko* too. And not to waste all of the *kalua* pig when they *kalua* the pig, so we'd have to learn how to clean the liver. Yeah; and then you saved the blood from the pig also. And then, you had to cook it up with the *kalua* pig. So that's like one thing that not too many people eat, that we still do also. And the *naau*, we still do that. It's the ...

The pig intestines. But now, everything needs to be certified.

Yeah.

We're culturally certified, so we don't have any homemade or home slaughtered pork, pork parts.

Organs; yeah, You buy it and you cook it.

I see.

Everything needs to come in from the mainland. We've seen a lot of government regulations put on the foods that native Hawaiians are used to eating, so the generation now, they're missing a lot of the traditional ways of preparing things. But I think health wise, and for the safety of everyone, something needed to be done.

People who love Hawaiian food don't know some of these Hawaiian foods, because they're not available in any quantity elsewhere.

Yeah. Like dried fish. Before, on the Big Island, all of the dried *akule*, everything came from the Big Island, *milolii*, *akule*, *opelu*. Now, there isn't any, so a lot of

the fish that needs to be sold, it's imported fish from Asia, and then you improvise.

So, you buy the dried fish, and then you do all --

Right. You buy it frozen.

Yeah; you buy it frozen, and then we dry it. Process it in our way. Yeah.

In our parents' generation, my dad would buy by the pounds. And back then, it was called *kau*. The Hawaiian way of measuring was the *kau*.

K-A-U?

K-A-U; yeah.

And what was that?

It was like, so many pieces of dried *opelu* or dried *akule* was one *kau*. So, when you ordered it from the fisherman, you'd say, I want three *kau*'s of dried *opelu*. And they knew what you were talking about.

Rachel and Lorraine Haili's mother was of Chinese ancestry, and she encouraged her children to take pride in their Hawaiian and Chinese heritage. After the birth of each of her six children, the matriarch would visit a Chinese temple to ask the fortuneteller to bestow a Chinese name on each daughter, according to the time and day of her birth. All of the girls were given Hawaiian names as well. The Haili family continues to honor this practice.

'Til today, we still do a lot of the things that my mother respected and taught us to do. You know, like, we still go to the cemetery for Ching Ming, and we do it for my father, my mother, my sister, and my aunties, just because it's something my mother taught us that we should do for our ancestors.

Do you think your children will do it?

My children, yeah. They're very involved with the cultural things that we do.

So, you're pretty sure that'll be continued.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I think so.

Lorraine is very culturally in tune. She's a grandmother, and for a young generation grandmother, she wants to be called *Popo*, you know, which is the Chinese name for grandma.

So, my grandchildren call me *Popo*, and my grandchildren are multicultural. They're Tongan, Samoan, Hawaiian-Chinese, and then, my granddaughter is Hawaiian-Chinese, Caucasian. And it's like a melting pot at home.

Now, why did you choose *Popo*? Is that because your mom was *Popo*? Because you could have said *Tutu*, or *Puna* for *Kupuna*.

Puna; right. When my first grandson was born, I said, No, I waited this long, and my children grew up with a *Popo*. My mother was *Popo* to all of the grandchildren.

But your father was not *Gung Gung*.

He was.

He was *Gung Gung*?

He was *Gung Gung*.

He was a Hawaiian *Gung Gung*.

Yes.

Yup.

Yeah.

He was *Gung Gung*. And that's what my grandkids call my husband.

Oh ...

Gung Gung.

In the late 1960s, Rachel Haili had just graduated from college in Ohio. When she returned home to help run the family business, her mother, at age forty-eight, had suffered the first of a series of debilitating strokes, and only a few years later, Rachel's father died at age fifty-three. Rachel took on the job of supervising her sisters and the other relatives who worked at the store. It's now

her younger sister Lorraine's turn to carry on with the family business that presents challenges each year.

When I was young, I always said to myself, You're going to study really hard, and you're going to go away to college, and you're going to get a good job. You're gonna be like a college administrator or something.

You're never gonna de-vein another liver in your life.

I'm never gonna clean another *aku*. I'm never gonna do that again. And, it turns out, I had to come back and do exactly what I had said I wasn't going to do. But, luckily, my family had prepared me for that. They had taught me how to do everything that was necessary to run the business, and then I think going away to college, I learned to be a little more independent and to make decisions. And I had been taught all my life that family is first and you need to take care of your family, so it was a no-brainer for me. I had to get everybody set. I thought, well, by the time my younger sisters graduate from school, I can go back to school. And time just kinda went along, and I was enjoying doing what I was doing, and it just flowed. So, by then, I was like forty, and I was like, well, do I want to start from the bottom all over and go get a job and work for somebody else? I had already worked for myself.

And look who's running the business now.

I'm glad she has --

It's my turn. [CHUCKLE]

I think it's so wonderful that one sister has passed the baton to another, and now, you are the only sister working in the shop after six did.

But I also have my nephew, Kaulana, who is the son of our youngest sister, Carol. And so, he's stepping in and learning the ropes. And then, my children come in. My two sons are firefighters, by the way, so they come whenever I need help. And my daughter teaches, she's a schoolteacher, so she'll come on weekends or special events. And all of the other grandchildren, whenever we need help, they all step in. And business now, it's so different as far as the way things are done. There's no garage *laulau* making nights. Everything needs to be on a schedule. You have employees, you need to make sure that you have all your materials and supplies there when your employees come in, otherwise it's wasted time. And time is money when you're running a business, so that's what I need to get my children to understand.

And you've learned all that on the job. You've seen all the transitions.

That was the difference; we learned it on the job.

Well, I chuckle now, because back then, I used to tell Lorraine these things, and she'd just say, Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or I tell my sister them these things, and they say, Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so now, I hear Lorraine almost echoing me.

And the kids are saying, Yeah, yeah, yeah. [CHUCKLE]

Yeah, yeah, yeah. [CHUCKLE]

But you've done this for a long time, and you have the energy and the spirit to keep going.

This is what we know. And I still have a passion for it. I credit my mom and my father for allowing us, or letting us fly out of the nest for a little while. Rachel got to go away and go to college, she got her degree. My sisters, they all held other jobs. I was able to go to live in Chicago and New York, because I was a flight attendant for United Airlines, and decided this is not for me. I didn't feel like I belonged there. It was a fun job. When you're young and you're in your twenties, it's exciting. But then, you come back home to Hawaii, and it's like, I really don't want to go back to the mainland, I want to stay here.

And so, what made you decide to go back to the family business?

Because at that time, there was a need for me to be there. And my obligation to my family was very strong.

And my mother always stressed that even though she was pure Chinese, she always told us, You're half Hawaiian, and you need to be proud that you're Hawaiian. And that was a time when, you didn't speak Hawaiian, and being Hawaiian wasn't, something that you kind of touted, I guess. So, she always told us that. Be proud of who you are. In a way, our family has made a little bit of contribution to helping to preserve this Hawaiian culture, by offering Hawaiian food, good Hawaiian food.

We never thought that --

Yeah; we had no intention --

-- Hawaiian food was so important. Any kind of food to a culture, it's important. It's very important, because people will sit and share the food, and share conversation. And, it's always like when you parties.

We always gather around the table.

What kind of food did you have?

Right; it's like a language.

Right.

Food.

Yeah, it's a coming together. Like they say *paina*, and you come and you share. You not only share food, but you share good times, and camaraderie, and everything. But we never thought when we were doing this that, oh, we're learning this because we want to be able to preserve the *limu* culture, or whatever.

Right.

And it's just kind of like, when you look back and you say, Wow, when I say *limu lipepe*, everybody --

People look at you and go, What is that? [CHUCKLE]

Do you have regulars who come for the kind of foods that they don't see other places, and they come regularly to you for it?

For *ake* and raw squid.

And you know when they walk up, you know what they want.

Yeah, I already know what they want. There's a man that'll come for *lomi oio* once a week. I have to make sure that it's there on Fridays. And if I don't have it, he'll give me scoldings.

Isn't *oio* really bony?

Yeah, but the way that the *lomi oio* is prepared is, it's scraped, and then ... by hand, all of the pin bones are pulled out of the fish.

Yeah. That's why you have to learn how to clean the fish correctly, so when you cut it, the bone stays on one side, and when you scrape the meat off, it's easier.

Ah ...

Rather than getting everything in there.

And you've got all these other things going on in the shop, but you're basically making sure the bones don't go in the meat in this one *oio* fish.

M-hm.

Wow.

I really valued what my family had built up, what my parents had established. And I'm hoping that along the way, somebody else in our family is going to recognize, what this is, and what it could be, and what opportunities their grandparents and their parents, and their aunts and uncles have created, and can perpetuate some of this. Because there is value to their lives, if they could just recognize and accept it.

In 2009, after nearly sixty years as a tenant at the Ward Farmer's Market, the Haili's Hawaiian Foods family operation lost its lease. The business went through a spell as a lunch wagon, and then found a modest new home in Kapahulu. With its sit-down restaurant atmosphere near Waikiki, a now expanding tourist clientele can experience a first taste of authentic Hawaiian cuisine. And of course, Haili's continues to be a favorite gathering spot for local people to enjoy traditional Hawaiian foods like *lomi oio*, *ake*, and raw squid, coming not from a recipe book, but from the heart. Thank you, Rachel Haili and Lorraine Haili Alo for sharing your long story short. And thank you, for watching and supporting PBS Hawaii. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A *hui hou*. 'Til next time, *aloha*.

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

God, I remember when all the whole beach was covered with seaweed, and you just have to walk on the shore and pick it. We should be concerned about too, is how can we bring back all of these *limu*'s and preserve our culture. 'Cause nobody knows now when you say *huluhulu waena*, or *lipoa*, what those *limu*'s taste like.

Where do you get your *limu* now?

Commercially, we have to buy *ogo*. We get ours from the farms, the *limu* farms. And then, there's still *limu kohu* in the ocean, so whenever there's fishermen that come into our store and they say that they have *limu kohu*, I'll buy it from them. Because a lot of the fishermen are still dependent on the ocean for their livelihood.

