

GUEST: HOALA GREEVY

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The earliest career I wanted was when I was in Kapahulu, and they had the trash day, and those garbage guys were pretty cool. So, taking out the trash, that was the first job I wanted to have. 'Cause they'd be whistling and running, and the compactor's coming down, and they'd be throwing stuff right at the right moment. I remember kids would come out, and I wouldn't be the only kid watching them. So, I guess in a way, that's what Pau Spam does, is take out people's garbage.

[CHUCKLE]

Hoala Greevy discovered his passion for software development in college, and at age twenty - four created Pau Spam, one of the first locally - owned computer spam and virus filtering companies. Hoala Greevy stays on the forefront of the latest technology while saving some time to pursue other interests. Hoala Greevy, 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. Hoala Greevy is a successful entrepreneur and businessman. He's a strong believer in public schools, and a proud graduate of McKinley High School in Honolulu. His young life was also shaped by his two parents, Ed Greevy and Haaheo Mansfield, who were community and political activists.**

Your father was known for being this wonderful behind the scenes photographer who was the only person with a camera, using it well, at really just touching moments in community activism protests. Save Our Surf, for example.

Yeah. From what I understand, he made friends with Uncle John Kelly, and he noticed when he was at these meetings and rallies that he was doing all the talking, but no one was taking any pictures. So, that was their bond. He'd take the pictures, Uncle John would do the talking, and then ... yeah, my dad just has this knack of disappearing in a crowd. Which I don't know how he does it with five cameras. [CHUCKLE]

But he was always there. It was a labor of love, he was working; he wasn't just attending a rally.

Right; yeah, hobby. He had a day job. A lot of it was Save Our Surf, protecting all these spots from development. And then, out of that, kinda spurring the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. And then, they started helping out these other groups of people. And then, yeah; so, in some circles, my dad is regarded as the documenter of the Hawaiian renaissance of the 70s and 80s.

Did your parents tell you much about meeting at the Stop H - 3 rally?

No. But there's a picture in my dad's book. They went into the Wilson Tunnel, I think in 1975, 76. And they were just cleaning the walls, but of course, there was letters behind it, and so that one of their clever marketing techniques about a rally they were gonna have at the Capitol. Stop H - 3 rally, Capitol, three o'clock; whatever.

Oh, they put it right in the tunnel.

Yeah; so they were just cleaning off the walls, and ...

But they didn't clean some parts of the walls.

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

I see. Did your parents explicitly give you life wisdom and rules for life?

My dad is an artist; he's very much an artist. And my mom is very practical, Hawaiian, loving. And they're both very supportive of whatever I chose to do. Except football; they wouldn't let me play football.

You are one of those people who've done very well professionally, having gone to public school all the way.

Oh, yeah. I'm a big fan of public schools.

Starting with Hukulani School.

Yeah. Went to Hukulani, and then Washington, and then McKinley.

Washington Intermediate had some town tough guys, and so did McKinley.

Yeah, yeah. [CHUCKLE]. So, I learned in college, all you needed to do was ask: You know what is search take? And people who went to private school, for obvious reasons, don't know what that means.

Search take; no.

Yeah. So, you're in the cafeteria, and the bull walks up and he's like, Eh, I like dollar. And of course, Oh, I no more. And then, the guy: Oh, what, search take? Oh, hold on a second. [CHUCKLE] But I thought that was just normal stuff.

How often did that happen to you?

Freshman year, quite a bit. And then, it was good to play baseball, I guess, and kinda keep out of that.

They didn't bother athletes?

Yeah, 'cause their friends would be on the football team, or whatever, and like, Eh, no bother that guy, he's on the baseball team.

So, in that sense, athletics was an escape and a passion?

Yeah, yeah; I love baseball. So, that was my thing in high school.

Did you worry that you wouldn't get to go to college?

No, I figured I was gonna go. My parents were pretty adamant about that. And I was lucky enough to get a scholarship, so that's why I got away to Portland State in Oregon.

Hoala Greevy's parents encouraged him to pursue his dreams. A gift from his father at a young age turned out to be an inspiration for his future career.

How did you begin your journey with computers? When did it start?

My dad got me a Commodore when I was kid.

How old were you?

Ten, I think. And then, so that was cool.

Big, hulky thing?

Yeah; yeah, yeah. Five and a quarter disc. And then, when I got to college, when I first logged in on that, what, ninety - six - hundred baud modem, and I was in some friend's room, and just connecting on the Internet was just ... I just knew it. I was like, Wow, all this information, all these people ... wow.

So, in college, that's when it really got sparked as far as what you could possibly do with it.

Yeah; I was sitting in a computer science class in Portland State, and they had a job posting board. And someone wanted a small utility app that was almost identical to the homework we just turned in. And I couldn't believe no one else had called, or maybe they had. So, I followed up as soon as I could, and I don't know, four or five days later, I met the guy in a Safeway parking lot with a three and a half inch disc. And my friend Andrew Lanning [PHONETIC], he says, You know, in business you can have it good, fast, or cheap. So, he got it good and fast, but it wasn't cheap. [CHUCKLE] He wasn't too happy about that, but that was fine.

Because you valued your work, and you charged big time?

I thought it was; for college, yeah, it was a pretty good crip. And he popped it in his laptop, it worked, he kinda mumbled about signing the check. And then, that was it. So, to me, it was solving a problem and being creative about it. So, that was kinda neat.

But that's so interesting to know that meeting in a Safeway parking lot, you valued your work, and you said, This is what it's gonna take to get you this.

I could tell he was motivated. So, I guess maybe the salesman in me came out.

Were you making it up as you went along?

Yeah, pretty much. [CHUCKLE]

You weren't quite sure what you were gonna charge?

And then, I split it with my buddy back home, 'cause he had a compiler that I needed. So, I had the code, he had the compiler, and we split the profits. So, it was fun.

So, that was the first business transaction.

I guess; yeah. And then, just kept doing stuff like that. Staying up late, sleeping at the office, all - nighters, things like that.

You're in college, still, at this point; right?

Oh, even out of college, sleep at the office, for sure. I think it's maybe a subconscious thing that if you're sleeping at the office, then you must be doing something right. [CHUCKLE]

[CHUCKLE] You're ready anyway; right?

Yeah; yeah.

So, whatever it takes, you're gonna do it. If it takes sleeping over, you're gonna do it.

Yeah. I remember reading in the late 90s, this reporter was doing a profile on the two Yahoo cofounders. I think it was Jerry Yang. He would routinely sleep under his desk in a sleeping bag, and I just thought that was kinda neat. This was in the late 90s, so when Yahoo was on a tear.

How did you get the resources to start business? Did you go seat of the pants at first?

Yeah; just bootstrap. Yeah, I don't know. Just make it happen.

You didn't major in business.

No; geography. [CHUCKLE] Hard one; the hard major.

And why was that?

I just wanted to get out of school. I was a computer science major, and then I figured that was gonna take me about seven years to get out. I was on scholarship. I was like, Nah, let me just take something I like. And then, I just studied in the computer labs, and still pursued computer stuff, but just took something I liked, just to graduate.

What excited you about software? Were you trying to do any particular thing, or just go wherever it went?

Oh; I just thought it was a way to express yourself and be creative, and solve a problem, and help people. And I still feel like that. I mean, I think it's just getting started. We're in the midst of a huge mobile adoption that's just getting started. And that's really exciting.

What kind of a mind do you need to be a really successful software developer?

Naïve. [CHUCKLE]

Thinking it can be done, and then having to work.

Yeah; forcing it.

And sleeping overnight to make it happen.

Yeah, I guess so. Shoot; I mean, there's a lot of different types, I think.

Well, what are the problems you wanted to solve, and did, with your development?

Well, I worked at an email company in the Bay Area. I moved back home in 2001. I was doing some Linux consulting, which at the time was really hard to explain to people. It still is. It's an open source operating system. And then, the few clients I had were complaining about the same thing over, and over again,

viruses and spam. So, I just sat down and pulled a few all - nighters, and came up with Pau Spam. And then, used that as a subscription - based model to help people out, and restore productivity to business.

And how rare was that contribution you made and that business that you created? I mean, because a lot of businesses have fallen by the wayside; but not yours.

Oh; yeah, I don't know. I guess no one's really put the stamp out on spam. It's still a huge problem. Probably ninety - four, ninety - five percent of all email on the Internet is rubbish. So, I guess, just got lucky in that regard that it's still a service that's needed.

Well, you've had to keep upgrading and working on opposition, and competition.

Yeah; sure. It's constant cat and mouse, upgrades, features. For sure.

Do you like that?

Yeah; it's fun. I mean, it's always changing, it's never boring.

It sounds like you've found an area that will always require work, and so it's great job security if you can keep up with demand.

Yeah. We're seeing some changes on the landscape the last couple years, so definitely gotta think ahead and plan for what's next on the horizon. And I see that as mobile. I mean, without a doubt.

I just read a stat, and this is 2013 as we're speaking. But mobile video use exploded by thirty - seven percent last year.

Oh, yeah. And I think the amount of Smartphones on the market was one billion last November, projected to be one - point - eight billion this December. And then, five billion by 2015. Seventy - five percent of all mobile usage is a game or a social network. People check their phones every six minutes, or a hundred and fifty times a day. And you've got this wild adoption of Smartphones, with no end in sight. I mean, I just don't see any stop to it. I think it's super - exciting.

And people are saying, I don't need a personal computer anymore; I can do this on my phone.

Yeah.

Do you like that, working in a field where it's just changing all the time, and you've really got to be on your game all the time?

Yeah; it's a lot of fun, for sure. I mean, we're seeing now with apps that people use, it's impossible to advertise your way to the top. So, what they do is, they create a habit for you. And so, the top apps have actually created habits out of people. So, when you ask someone, What do you do when you're bored?, a lot of Millennials, they're not gonna say TV or call a friend, they're gonna say, I'm checking an app on my phone, that's what I do when I'm bored. What do you do when you need a laugh? There are some huge shifts in human behavior, all within the last four or five years. So, that's pretty exciting, I think.

And are they going to the app store and just looking at whatever there is, or are they looking at some other means to find like the ten best apps? Or do they go word of mouth?

Facebook, word of mouth, the viral effect, stuff they see on You Tube. Yeah; it's pretty interesting right now.

You're very lucky to have found out in college what you wanted to do. It doesn't happen to very many people. Some people go their whole lives, and don't know what will really jazz them in terms of a career.

Yeah; I did get lucky, I guess. I mean, we have this app called DareShare that we released in June, which is a spinoff company. And it's an app that gets people to do silly, funny things and share it. And that excites me to no end. I mean, we're in forty - three countries right now, we're trying to grow our user base. And to express yourself to all these people out there, and hopefully a lot, lot more. I mean, that's really fun.

It must be hard to talk to non - tech people about what you do, because it is, quote, technical.

I think on the general level, people can relate. Especially for what we're doing now with DareShare and being an app, and something silly and fun and new. I think it transcends boundaries and language, and culture.

That's interesting, that you do one really practical and necessary thing, Pau Spam, and then this is silly. But you could argue it's necessary to have a joke and to blow off stress.

Yeah. To me, mobile, fertility, silly things, photo sharing, those are really big macro trends. And I think DareShare is greatly affected by my interpretation of macro trends going on right now in the world. So, it's a scientific approach to being funny and silly, is what we're doing.

That sounds kind of just like you.

[CHUCKLE]

Scientific approach to being silly. [CHUCKLE]

In addition to his passion for developing computer software that will make people laugh and protect people from unwanted email, Hoala Greevy has another side to him, a hobby that probably would have pleased his great - great - grandfather, who was an expert fisherman.

Your middle name, I don't know if there's an *okina*, but it can either mean king or fish.

Fish.

Is it fish?

Fish.

[CHUCKLE]

Moi; fish.

***Moi*.**

Yeah.

And you have become a fisherman.

Yeah; I got into it. Yeah. I enjoy kayak fishing, for sure. Yeah.

Oh, I've seen some crazy videos on You Tube with people hooking huge things, and being dragged in the kayak.

Yeah.

Real dangerous, especially getting it onboard.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

With a gaff.

That's the lure, man. That's who's hunting who? [CHUCKLE]

What kind of fish are you looking for?

Oh, well, on a kayak, you can almost catch anything the guys on a boat are catching. But, when I first started, I was like, Man, what's the biggest, baddest fish in the water? It's marlin, right? So, I'm like, Okay, I want to get that.

Oh!

So, I kinda chased that fish for about three years, and I got lucky, and a couple years ago, I caught a couple, and that was exciting.

Don't they have bills? I mean, you know --

Yeah.

That could just stab you, it could go right through you.

It's the only fish with a weapon of its own, so that was a big, big lure for me to hunt one of 'em.

And they go deep, they try to drag you under; right?

Yeah; aerals, turn you in circles, all kinds of stuff.

And you don't have a lot of protection. I mean, you're in a kayak.

Yeah.

Out far.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, it just feels kind of primal. I don't know what you want to call it, but definitely you versus the fish. Yeah; there's no boat to anchor you down or anything. If it wants to take you, it's gonna take you.

Have you rolled over, or had a real close call?

Oh, that still happens. But when I caught those marlin, I got lucky, I didn't *huli*. So, just stabilized the best I could. Yeah.

And they're wiggling, they're flopping around next to you in the kayak?

Yeah. [CHUCKLE]

Oh! What other things have you caught? What other kind of fish have you caught?

I mean, the *mahi*, *ono*, the usual stuff.

And *mahi* are strong, too.

Yeah; they're good fighters, and they give you the aerial display, and it's kinda neat. And then, I got lucky this year. It's an ugly fish, but I got the State record for the fine scale triggerfish, or *hagi* most fishermen call it.

What does a triggerfish look like?

Ugly, trigger, big gross thing. And I just got lucky and ... I don't know. State record, and I submitted it, and it became a world record.

Wow!

For that particular fish.

And how big was it?

I think it was about fifteen or sixteen pounds. So, kinda big for that.

What was the challenge in getting it in?

[CHUCKLE] It was so ugly.

[CHUCKLE]

I didn't know quite what to do with it. [CHUCKLE] Yeah; not a good - looking fish. But I figured, just bring it in and see what happens.

Was it good eating?

No; no, no. My friends ate it, and they got sick.

Oh! But you got a world record.

Yeah. So, yeah, I don't know if it's any consolation to their stomachs, but yeah, I got the world record.

So, it's obviously dangerous, but nothing has happened to you that scared you out there?

No; I mean, it's humbling, but I haven't had any close calls yet. We carry radios, our phones, I have an EPIRB emergency locator. So, we try our best.

So, what happens to you if you go over?

Yeah; you gotta try your best to stay with the kayak and your paddle. But I don't know; I guess that's part of the mystique, I guess, is maybe harkening back to olden days, and guys paddling out on their canoes, and stuff.

Do you feel something Hawaiian from your Hawaiian side about that?

I do. I mean, we have more equipment, sonar, fish finder, bait well, things like that. But, a lot of the spots are the same, the techniques are very the same. A lot of it involves catching *opelu*, which is, kind of a family fish.

That's really different from what you do for a living.

Yeah, I guess so. But to me, the water is an escape, and humbling, playground, vast, infinite. Kinda neat. You feel so small and nothing.

In addition to his affinity for fishing and the ocean, Hoala Greevy feels a deep connection to the Hawaiian culture in other ways as well. Many of his Hawaiian values come from his mother.

Why is your name Hoala?

Well, my mom had a dream, and I don't know what was in the dream, but they said, Hey, name your kid Hoala.

And what does it mean?

Awaken, or new beginning. So, it's either a family member, a dream, or something happening at the time of birth; those are usually the three ways people get their names.

Yours is a dream name.

Yeah; and I think what I do after business will be the realization of that name. Why would a person like my mom have that dream? And if you've ever met my mom, she's a pretty interesting and special person. Why would she have that dream? How do I go about realizing the meaning of that?

But interesting; you don't think it's in the tech field, especially.

To some degree, but I want to create something that outlives me. So, yeah; I think that's something special.

Let's talk about being Hawaiian.

Okay.

What does that mean to you?

A vibrant, beautiful past, a troubling present, and an uncertain future. That's what it means.

Do you think tech could help, will help?

Yeah. I mean, I think it can help in a lot of ways. But I'm so focused on -- yeah, I don't know. I think that's down the road.

That's not where your passions run?

No; later. Later, I'd like to do stuff. But right now, it's business and hit that homerun, and then go hit another one. I mean, for sure; business is definitely where it's at right now, for me.

How many hours a week do you work? Do you have any idea?

No. Probably not as many as you. [CHUCKLE]

I don't know about that. I'm not sleeping at the office.

[CHUCKLE] Yeah; I don't if that's a good thing, still. But, I think there's a lot of good and a lot of troubling things about being Hawaiian now. And so, I'd like to help out with that. My mom's a social worker, right? So, you see or you hear about stuff, and there's a perpetual cycle of poverty, and how is that in Hawaiian culture. And it's like, you got the self - medicating drug abuse, you got issues at home, not going to college, and it kinda spins upon itself and perpetuates through generations. And I don't know if I know the answer to that, but you know, I'd like to help out with that at some point. For sure.

So many causes.

Yeah. I mean, incarceration, diabetes, domestic violence, drugs, alcohol. I mean, I don't even have to look farther than my own family to see all of that. And I think ninety - eight percent of every Hawaiian out there, if they really think about it, it's all right in front of them.

You have a passion that you're deferring to better the condition of Hawaiians, if you can.

Yeah.

What are your thoughts about quality of life today? You keep your business here because of quality of life.

Yeah. I mean, I think, shoot, since maybe the recession in 2008, I think a lot of the middleclass has gone down to a notch below that, especially on the

Hawaiian side. We see this a lot with other minorities on the mainland. It's a larger class teetering on the poverty line. So, like the disappearance of the middleclass, I think is a definite reality in a lot of Hawaiian families. And then, we see the wealthy side getting exponentially richer. Which I don't know if you can fault people for that, but within the last five years, there's been a big vacuum, I think, in the middleclass.

And that's a cause for concern; right? And also, not having a college degree really affects people's ability to work in an era where it's the knowledge era, it's the information era. And that means tech.

Yeah. I'd really like to make an impact on people's going to college, for sure, once I get some other stuff done. For sure. [CHUCKLE]

Competitive business and hardcore fishing now, activism and altruism later. Mahalo to Hoala Greevy, founder of the computer spam and virus filtering system Pau Spam, for sharing his story with us. And mahalo to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, a hui hou.

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

Are you still close to people you went to school with?

Yeah; more so my college friends, I guess. But, I still keep in touch. I'm still very, very into McKinley.

I know you've participated with the McKinley School Foundation, which is just an awesome supportive fundraising arm of McKinley.

Oh, yeah.

Or supportive of McKinley.

We created our own Class of 1994 Scholarship. We have a two - year and a four - year category. The amounts aren't big, but it's a good start. And I think that our society, college is the equalizer. It's your ticket out, so the more people we can get in college, I think it just helps society as a whole.