

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



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Mom kept it pretty secretive as to the hard times. But the hard times were more a result of not having maybe what some of the other kids did. Like a few of the families had cars, some of 'em had telephones, eventually they would get television. Like we never got a television until ... no, we never got a television until ... I don't think they ever bought a television, to be honest with you. We didn't get a phone until I was in high school.

This Maui native, who struggled as a student in his early years, would go on to win Hawaii teaching honors. Retired public school chemistry teacher, Ed Ginoza, next on Long Story Short.

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

Aloha mai kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Ed Ginoza didn't realize he could be a good student until a teacher encouraged him. He became a teacher, who in turn, encouraged many students to excel, introducing them to the world of science. For nearly three decades, Ed Ginoza of Kihei taught chemistry, math, and physics at Maui High School. Many of his students have gone on to study science at top colleges, including MIT, Yale, and Stanford, and they've had successful careers in the field. And Ginoza says it was important to treat everyone equally, because he knew what it was like to feel less-than as an Okinawan kid growing up on a plantation in West Maui.

I was born in Pu'uukoli'i. It's a little plantation village. I wouldn't say little-little, but it was ... actually, at one time, it was quite a large village. And we had six children; three boys, three girls. I was the fourth of the six. And Dad was an irrigator, and that's all I knew him as, an irrigator. My mother ... she was a housewife, pretty much. And so finances were real tough. We never got a car until after I left.

So, did it feel like you were getting short-shrift? 'Cause sometimes people learn they have abundance, even when the money is low, and sometimes it just seems really hard.

I don't think we felt that deprived, because most of us were pretty much in the same situation. I mean, you're on a plantation, and all the kids are almost in the same situation. Some people are worse off than others.

What was it like small-kid times on the plantation? You talked about how the family had trouble, you know, with hard times. What else?

You know, grammar school up to the fourth grade was okay. Fifth and sixth grade was kinda bad. I've already said that. Seventh grade was bad. Eighth grade was okay. But actually, living in community in some ways was good, because you know, we were all pretty much friends. But being Okinawan had some drawbacks, made you feel a little bit insecure.

Weren't there a lot of Okinawans on the plantation?

Not where we lived at. There were just three families of Okinawans.

And what was everybody else?

From all over the place. They were considered Japanese; we were considered Okinawans.

And you were always very conscious of that?

I've always been conscious of that. And with ourselves, we weren't treated badly, but my sister was. She suffered some prejudice.

How so?

Because we're different.

They teased her?

No; I really don't remember what, you know, exactly what she went through. But I remember my mother or my sister saying, yeah, she had some prejudice against her by certain individuals. So, it was pretty much of a normal life, as far as growing up. We went to the Methodist church and we were part of a youth group, so all our friends were there. But it was a segregated place. I mean, Japanese Camp, Filipino Camp, the Portuguese. And the segregation, a lot of times, came out in fights with the kids,. Because I remember some of my friends would fight with the Portuguese kids.

Because the Portuguese kids' parents were the lunas.

Right; right. And I don't know why, but it was just—yeah; yeah.

With kid stuff, it could be anything.

Yeah.

It doesn't have to have a reason.

Yeah.

Right?

Right. And there would be fights with some of the Hawaiian kids. But prejudice was kind of widespread at that point.

And you were a small minority, with only three families who were Okinawan. Now, what would be the discrimination against Okinawans?

In Puukoolii, the boys didn't suffer that. But I know that on Oahu, actually, it was worse, where people would get divorced if they married an Okinawan.

And that was because Okinawans were ... country folk?

The Japanese were really almost—you know, their culture is a very homogenous type of culture. Right? They don't approve of Koreans. Even the great baseball player, he was Korean, actually. But they're very prejudiced against outsiders. They call them gaijin, or hakujin, they call the foreigners, they refer to them as. But we growing up, I never really felt that with most of my friends. With my friends, anyway. But I remember my dad had some feeling about Filipinos, because my sister was thinking about going out with a Filipino boy, and they objected. Which was always very fascinating, because I have a Portuguese uncle, and you know, he seemed to be all right.

After high school, Ed Ginoza went to college in Colorado, where he graduated with a degree in chemistry, and later earned a master's in education. Ginoza says his parents initially balked at sending him to college, but ended up sacrificing to make it happen.

Fortunately, Dad and Mom had an endowment insurance policy for about eighteen hundred dollars. The endowment policy doesn't exist anymore; they made it illegal. But they would get a cash payout after, you know, twenty years or something like that. And they finally agreed to send me to college with that endowment. I look back now, and I think, Wow, they spent their entire life savings to send me to college.

That's amazing. Where did you go?

I went to a small school in Colorado, Adams State College.

Did you know you wanted to go into science when you started in college?

Actually, I wanted to go into engineering. Don't ask me how I knew about engineering, but I said, Okay, I like math, I like science, so I wanted to go into engineering. So, I went there with the idea of taking the pre-engineering course, and then after a year, they offered me, you know, National Defense Loan. At that time we had this NDA loan which was three percent interest. And so, they offered that to me, and then my chemistry teacher said, Why don't you just stay here and major in chemistry, physics, and math, instead of going to engineering school.

And so, what did you get offered? It was a scholarship or a loan?

I had a scholarship for the first quarter, which paid my in-state tuition. Then, during the third quarter of walking down the aisle and the dean of the college—you know, small school, so he asked me how things were, and I said, Oh, it's going pretty good, I think I'm gonna get a 4.0 grade point average this quarter, while working fulltime in a Chinese restaurant.

Oh, you didn't mention the fulltime in a Chinese restaurant.

Yeah. Yeah; I worked, well, pretty close to fulltime. I would go in at four o'clock, and I wouldn't get back until ten o'clock. And so, I reduced one course; I carried twelve credits, and then did that. And so, the dean said, You know, if you want to go to summer school, I've got this money that you can have. So I talked to my parents, and my parents says, Go ahead. And the loan actually covered my tuition, my books, and living expenses.

Because you did well in your early days in college.

Yeah; yeah.

Socially, what was it like?

Socially, it was different. There weren't too many Hawai'i kids there. In fact, when I got there, I think there was three of us. Yeah; socially, it was little difficult, because we were different.

And it must have been confusing to people, 'cause you're a Japanese guy working in a Chinese restaurant. When did you decide you were gonna be a teacher?

After I graduated, I decided. By then, I had most of the credits to be a teacher. So, I just needed like student teaching, so I said, Okay, maybe I'll just complete that part.

Now, I've heard that you were actually offered a couple of jobs teaching, but you wouldn't take them, even though you were unemployed, because you felt strongly you wanted to work at a public school.

Yeah; that was after I came back. I went to Baldwin, and we have what they call vice positions, which is a one-year ... you know, you're only obligated for one year. And after 1972, all of us who were probationary teachers were released. So, a friend of mine and I—Peter Martin, he's now a big developer on Maui, were up at USIU, which is United States International University. And so, we were at the site taking a class, and the head of USIU asked me if I ever considered working with the university. Because they were trying an experimental school, where they were taking high school sophomores, kids after their sophomore year, they were trying to put them in the university. And I also met Dr. Melrose's wife, who was the head of Seabury, and she asked me if I would consider working at Seabury. But I decided that wasn't the route for me. I wanted to go back to the public school.

Why?

I've always been a strong believer in the public school. I've always felt that, you know, public schools is where I grew, and I felt that we need teachers in public schools just as much as any place else. And I just, I guess, felt there were certain other benefits that I like about teaching in the public school and working for the State. One was, I knew the retirement system was much better. But at that time, I don't know why; I just felt like, Okay, I'm going back to public schools.

After one year at Baldwin High School, Ginoza was hired as chemistry teacher at Maui High School, where he would work for the rest of his career, and pick up awards for his teaching. Ginoza firmly believes that being a great educator means helping students in the classroom, and beyond.

Teaching is really almost a creative art that most people don't realize. You can't just throw a subject matter at kids. You can't just stand in front of a class and expect them to love you, or whatever. You have to have, you know, experiences, and you need stories.

So, you need to build a bond.

You need to build a bond. Right; right. And it's a bond and it's a trust issue. You need to get the trust of the kids, but you have to develop a relationship with the kids. And this is where I say that most of the relationships I developed, or a lot of it, was after

school hours. Like in the 70s, I would take the kids and started a science club, and we'd take the kids hiking all over the island. We actually even went to the Big Island one year. And we would always go through the Haleakala Crater. And what the kids remember is those trips that we took.

So, you you bonded over activities that had to do with—

And classes, too. Because I would keep my room open so the kids would eat lunch there, and they would play chess, or they would ask for homework help. And I actually had classes like on Tuesday nights when I was teaching AP. So, the kids would come. But it was also very social.

That means a lot from you, taking time off from your days off, and taking them to do things, having classes open.

Yeah, it was.

When other teachers might have had some quiet time.

Yeah; most teachers went into the lunchroom, or had quiet time. But I found out, hey, you know, the kids need help, I'll be there. I gave up my prep period every day after school to work with the kids. Which meant that I would have to do my prep at night, so it was always ten o'clock at night before I'd quit. And weekends, I would be working on their papers. But I also did certain things, I think, that were really powerful. And one of the things I did early on was, when kids took exams, I would always have the results for them the next day, even when I went on a trip.

During the time of mainstreaming, you had a science class, and one of your students was blind.

Yes; I got him when he was a freshman. And I was really very reluctant, because I had to completely change the way I taught the course. And maybe it was good, because now, I had to prepare everything three weeks in advance.

Oh, preparation again.

Yeah; it was. And it forced me to prepare three weeks in advance. Because any written material would have to be first brailled.

Oh ...

And I told you about, you know, how his previous teacher had treated him.

How was that?

She would explain something, and then point to the board, not realizing that he was blind. And she had no regard for how he felt. And he was kind of quiet, but that happens a lot with kids. You know, even if they don't understand, they remain quiet. But then, later on, it would come up. And so, I made sure that everything I said was not only on the board, but I had to verbally give instructions, I had to verbally explain how to do things that would normally require ... easiest way to do it is put it on the board. But for example, I remember trying to teach him what they call dimensional analysis. Dimensional analysis is nothing more than doing conversions either from centimeters to millimeters, to inches, or cups to quarts, to gallons. But I had a specific way that I wanted them to do the work. And at first, he had a little difficulty, but the instructions finally took hold. Because one day, he said he was on the bus going home, and he said, I understand how it's done. Then when he graduated, he came to see me and said, Mr. Ginoza, thank you very much. He said, You made science crystal clear, and I could actually see the universe.

The achievements of Ed Ginoza's students in science caught the attention of recruiters from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

1971, 72, when I had my first student going to MIT, there were very few people that were going into MIT. And I just so happened to get the recruiter, who was the past president of the MIT Foundation that ran the place. And he told me; he said what we did at Maui High was very, very unusual. Because at that time, they didn't look at the applicants from Hawai'i as, you know, like a primary recruiting area.

But Maui High stuck out on the list?

Maui High stuck out on the list, to the point where my principal came back, and one of my principals said people in Oahu were talking about how we had the key to the back door at MIT, because we started putting kids in on a regular basis.

You said your kids nominated you for Teacher of the Year in 1988, which you won. What did they say about you? Did they say, Whoa, he's really rough, but he'll give you a fair shake?

Yeah. Interesting, because yeah, I was considered as a real tough teacher. But apparently, you know, the impact that I had on them was interesting. I wish I had brought my little book with me that one year after I got that, then the kids had a luncheon in Koho's, a restaurant Downtown, and they invited me. And all the kids were there, and they presented me with a thank-you book.

Why did you win Teacher of the Year? What was it?

Actually ... the kids recommended me. I mean, my students; it was actually the students that decided what teacher they were gonna put for Teacher of the Year. And actually, I got put in twice. In '87, I went for district; I didn't get picked. Then actually in '87, I got picked. '86, I didn't get picked. But I found out why I didn't get it in '86. Because my essay was a little bit too negative.

About what? About the DOE, perhaps?

Yeah, it was about the DOE. I said that it's unfair for kids to leave in all these classes because of student activities. So, when I got picked again in '87, then I decided, okay, that didn't go over too well, so I wrote another essay on a more positive side.

Political adventure there.

Yeah; you know, it's how you approach. You know, I learned from that first experience that, don't be negative.

Can you tell when you're helping kid, that this is going to mean something to them? Or is it not clear at the time whether it's taking sometimes?

That's the interesting part. You can tell not by what they say, because a lot of times, the kids will look at you and say, Yeah, yeah, I understand. But you know if it's not taking hold. I know when it's not taking hold, so I have to take a different approach to it.

So, at some point, can you see a little light bulb go off?

Oh, yes.

Can you actually see that?

Oh, yes.

You've had some students go on to some terrific science positions. Can you recall any of them for me right now?

Yeah; the one I remember, the one that always fascinated me was, I had this girl when she was a junior and senior. And I had taught her, again, dimensional analysis, which is a very powerful tool in teaching physics and chemistry. And she went on to the University. She wasn't very confident that she could handle engineering. But she wrote back to me and she said, I went to the University, I took chemistry, and I maxed the first

exam. And then, she said from there, she went on to Stanford for her master's in electrical engineering, and she wrote to me from Intel.

Ed Ginoza retired in the year 2000, but he continues to share his passion with students. As a Hawaii Science Bowl coach, Ginoza mentors Maui High School students who are vigorous contenders and high performers at the competitions.

There's so much time and effort put into that. What does it mean to the students who participate?

For them to participate, and the ones who really take it seriously, it really builds their backgrounds. It really solidifies their background. And the one thing sometimes that I don't mention is that I actually have them doing the teaching.

They teach themselves?

No. You know, when you teach the kids, some kids are gonna progress much faster than others; right? And like right now, I've got a procedure where if one kid is answering all the questions, then I hand him the questions, and he runs the session. Like for example, I have one kid doing it right now, and he's using the techniques that I taught him. So, they become the teacher. And the interesting part is, these kids come back, and they love to teach. The graduates a lot of times will come back and help me with the math, or whatever. Like, I have kids from MIT coming back and actually doing the teaching; they will teach them some advanced stuff.

You're not getting paid for it; right?

Yeah.

And it's not part of school credit, so it's a labor of love, but it's also very hard to make it happen.

Yeah; and we're having actually our twenty-fifth anniversary. But I think sometimes, you know, we look at reward by monetary means. But I felt that there's things that I did that money can't buy, because of the success of the kids. I mean, you can't buy that type of gratification that you get. Money doesn't ... yeah, it would be nice to get paid. People always ask me, Why do you do it? You're not getting paid for that? And you know, I say, everything's not about money. I mean financially, I guess, I'm set, so it's not a problem too. Yeah.

But being a math guy, have you ever computed how many hours you've spent training Science Bowl competitors?

I have.

Okay. So, what's the deal? How much money would you have made if you got paid?

I have never figured out how much money I would be paid.

So, how many hours?

Well, you can figure at least two hours every day, minimum. And not counting prep time, vacations. We go summer, we go Christmas vacation, we go Easter breaks. I don't know; maybe five, six hundred hours, maybe more. Twenty-something years of doing that.

You mean, not five hundred per year?

Oh, yes; per year.

Five, six hundred per year, times decades.

Pretty close to that; yeah. Maybe not quite five hundred. Yeah, I would say maybe four hundred.

Wow. And it was worth it; it's all been worth it?

It's all been worth it.

What about when Punahou beats you?

I'm not too happy.

Well, you beat Kalani, my alma mater.

Well, we beat Kalani, we beat Punahou, we beat 'Iolani. Yeah. 'Iolani's not too happy when we beat them. And since 2002, we've taken six science bowls, so you can figure that we've probably won as many as the private schools. You know, any private school.

Makes you feel good to say that, doesn't it?

Yeah, it does.

Ed Ginoza met his wife in a college physics class. They raised two daughters. And at the time of our conversation in 2016, they'd been married for fifty-one years. Mahalo to

Ed Ginoza of Kihei, Maui for sharing your story with us. And thank you, for joining us. For PBS Hawai'i and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, a hui hou.

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There must be something about having taught on an island for so many years, and then you see not only your students, but your students' kids, and their kids, and relatives. I mean, what's that like?

I found it to be actually kinda nice. I had an optometrist, and he gave me a free pair of glasses. He lost the bill. Sometimes, I see one of the students I had in high school who I was very close to, and she's a pharmacist at Kaiser. So, it's kinda nice in a way, because when you do a good job, the kids also respond in a like manner.

[END]