

# LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



**TITLE: Lopaka Kapanui**

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As local people growing up here in Hawai'i, we've been conditioned to believe that it's a negative thing because of, you know, the different ethnicities who come here, who're still here. My job mainly, is not just to tell ghost stories and to scare people, but also to clear up that misunderstanding of what this is all about which is really, really communication.

**He says his spooky stories aren't made up, they're based on history, experience, and a knowledge and understanding of the unseen. Meet this Hawaiian ghost storyteller next, on Long Story Short.**

**One-on-one engaging conversations with some of Hawai'i's most intriguing people. Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox.**

**Aloha mai kākou, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Robert Lopaka Kapanui is many things including a writer, an actor, a cultural practitioner, and even a former professional wrestler, yet he's best known as a storyteller whose made a business of taking people on tours of what he calls O'ahu's most haunted places. Like many who grew up in Hawai'i, Lopaka first started hearing ghost stories at a young age and says he even had a few of his own supernatural experiences. He also experienced a scary start to his own life, but the reason for that was not supernatural.**

At three months of age, I was severely malnourished and they said I was about the size of a rolled up newspapers, and my mother was having an argument with my grandfather and refused to go home. So, instead she chose that we should live in a station wagon behind a bar in Kalihi. But my health wasn't good and my mother didn't have the means, financially, to take care of me in that capacity, and so, as hard as it was for her, and she told me this later on, she had to do something, you know, to help me and to make sure I had a better life and her only option was to give me up for adoption, and at an appliance store where my mom worked as a secretary, she met a nice man who ended up becoming my adopted. My adopted parents had a little boy that they'd lost a short time before my adoption and so this sort of all worked out for them. The only condition after the adoption was that my biological mother couldn't see me. That's the agreement she had to make, that she wouldn't involve herself in my life and not try to reconnect at any point, and so she had to agree to that.

**And so, when did you see her again?**

I saw her when I was 15 years old and she called my adopted father and told him that my biological grandfather passed away and his last request was to have me at his services, and the funny thing is my biological mother told me later on that she actually had a dream of what I would look like, what I would be wearing at the services for my grandfather, and so when I walked into Hawaii Memorial, there I was in the beige shirt she imagined me in, the white jeans, the slippers, and my hairstyle, of all things.

**I guess at three months you wouldn't have any uh, remembrance that you were, that you had a really tough time as a baby, that you obviously were really hungry and you were weak. How do you look back on your start in life? I mean, kind of a tough go.**

You know, the funny thing is I don't really recall any of that. I do know that I was sick for most of my early life, to the point that about six or seven years old, I had to go to Children's Hospital and I was there for a couple of months to have my kidneys cleaned out. You know, I'm a Buddhist, so we believe in karma. And so, I personally think that, you know, somewhere in my past life, I was someone who caused somebody a great deal of suffering and so, maybe it was my karma early in my life to go through this, to eradicate all of that early so I wouldn't have to go through that later in life.

**Tell me about your adoptive family, your new family, what are they like?**

You know, it's a crazy life. I am adopted by a traditional Portuguese family. I'm a Hawaiian kid and I grew up thinking I'm Japanese.

**Why? Because you lived in Kaimukī?**

We actually...

**Leslie: "You lived in Wai'anae side, weren't you?"**

We were in Wai'anae, and we spent every summer in Wainaku on the Big Island. And, um, it was toward the end of the plantation era, so, a bunch of us, even though we were different ethnicities, everything we did was intrinsically Japanese. Okazuya, the weekend watched Toyoma no Kin-san, Kikaida, everybody does karate. And so we don't think about it as being something Japanese, it's just something we all did.

**Well you were living with a Portuguese family, so did they have a sense of the ghosts?**

You know the funny thing is, they would stay up all night with all the other neighbors and talk about ghosts and things that happened when they were growing up and so

none of us were ever able to, to listen to that we had to go to sleep, and you know, I used to get spankings for this all the time, I would sneak underneath the kitchen table, because they had the big crochet cover, and I would hide and listen to them tell ghost stories. And so, they were very, very aware of what was going on and for the larger part of my younger years...and you know, in retrospect, I understand now why, but my adoptive father would always remind me that I was adopted and I wasn't his son, you know, and we'd go out and meet people and he would introduce my brothers and say, oh this is, you know, my adopted son, not my real son. Father and son baseball game, my two older adoptive brothers don't wanna play, I'm like, dad, we can go do it. No, cannot, you're my adoptive son, the article says father and son, not you. And so, one of the things that happened is while I was in the hospital, my adoptive father was at work and he went to use the bathroom and he said someone's pounding on the door, pounding on the door, turning the doorknob, and he says outside, after he yells to cut it out, he hears a voice saying, dad, dad, open the door, let me in, it's me, dad, let me in. Claims it's my voice, but knows it can't be me because I'm in the hospital. And he says, whoever that is, just go away, go away, leave me alone. And then he hears the voice say, I know why you don't want to open the door, dad. Cause I'm not your real son. And it left. Come to find out they had to call a Portuguese fatsera to come look at the house and she told my adoptive parents, she says there's three Hawaiian people buried underneath this house and pointed to my adoptive father and said, they're upset at you because every day they hear you telling the boy he's not your real son, so they want to take him. They tired of hearing that. And so, her advice was, change your attitude now. He's either your son or not your son, but you make up your mind.

**You must've been thrilled to hear that.**

Oh, years later on, you know, when I was a teenager and just had enough and wanted to leave, uh..

**From Wai'anae, I believe you lived in...you moved around quite a bit, as a kid?**

We did, from Wai'anae we moved to Waimalu, and that was interesting, because we, we lived in a haunted house and it was owned by a local Japanese family, so it had the shoji doors and everything. And nothing quite happened that was scary until one night, we're sitting in the living room and the door to the hallway is here and we had this stand-up oil lamp, the only way you could make it work was through oil...sometimes the oil is dripping down the thing, and we see this little Japanese boy come out the door from the hallway, and he walks up to the oil lamp and he starts to lick it. He's licking the oil and he looks at us and he turns around and he leaves. Everybody's freaked out. We call a priest, he won't come. We call a kahuna, who won't come and so we call an odaisan, a Japanese, you know, person with, with gifts, who comes to the house and we explain what happened and that person says, oh, yes, in Japan they

have a ghost like that, it's usually a little boy and the ghost likes to lick the oil of the lamp. Can you get rid of it? Ah, yes, I will ask it to go somewhere else. And he said, same time, please throw away the lamp.

**Wow, so was that your first experience with the idea of ghosts?**

That was the first uh, visual experience. Up until then, I always heard voices, would have aromas around me, but never quite had the visual experience up until that time...and soon after that I became sick, about six or seven years old, had to go to the hospital, like I said, and while I was in the hospital, and this is a short story, my adopted grandmother, my adopted father's mom, would come every day and sit with me and I had a roommate next door, who I would play with, his name was Scotty, and after I get out of the hospital, I found out that my adopted grandmother, grandma Lucy, had passed away while I was in the hospital, but they didn't want to tell me because we're really close, and I described what she was wearing and my adopted father went into the living room and brought out the picture, the black and white portrait and it's the exact mu'umu'u that I saw her wearing. It turns out that that was the portrait that was displayed at her services. My roommate Scotty, was a very famous kid, back then he was in a commercial where he was singing a Hawaiian song and he was very upbeat, I had no idea he was sick until one evening, the curtains closed and I can see the doctors, hear the family, they're working on him, there's crying, they leave. You can see his silhouette sit up in the bed and I see him jump off his bed, his little shadow comes up to the partition and he says—friend, friend, let's play, c'mon friend, let's go play. And I start to get off the bed and then I hear my uh, adopted grandmother say behind me, don't get off that bed. I said, why? It's my friend Scotty, he wants to play. You get off that bed, your feet touch the floor, you go with him, you never come back. And that's at the old children's hospital.

**Lopaka Kapanui pursued several interests after finishing school including Hawaiian cultural practices, professional wrestling, and working in Waikīkī. But it wasn't until someone told him about a chicken skin ghost tour led by University of Hawai'i professor named Glen Grant, that he found everything he'd learned and experienced up until that point in his life was coming together.**

**The job you have now, the business you have, this is all, it's based on things that have happened to you all along?**

All of my life and then I run into this guy in 1994 who's hosting this downtown ghost tour and I'm working at the Halekulani at that time, and a gentleman by the name of Takeni Oshiro, who's in charge of the front desk, is raving about this tour, and so I go the following Wednesday and the place is, it's packed, a crowd of people...and when I hear this gentleman talk and he starts to go on about these stories, I'm astounded, I'm flabbergasted because the majority of what he's talking about are things I already

knew growing up and learned from my mom but the difference was there was documentation and there was history and there was things to back up these claims so that no one could say, well that's just made up Hawaiian legends, you know, old wives' tales.

### **What kind of documentation?**

He would show photographs of places that were haunted and then produce the map as to what the place was before. For instance, like a...the area around Aloha Tower, there's some sacrificial temples, there were areas where the spirits would gather late at night, you know, to, to basically frolic, and there was a map he showed regarding that and then it happens to be um, where the First Hawaiian Bank building is now. And as the tour went on, more people started to come and so, sometimes that tour would end like 2 o'clock in the morning. Um, the following Wednesday was when I was at hula with Keoni, because he's also my kumu hula, and he told us, so listen, by the way, um, this friend of mine, uh, is doing this ghost tour out to Wai'anae so I'm gonna do the, you know, Hawaiian part and he's going to do the other part, and he said, so you guys are gonna dance at the heiau at Poka'i Bay. And so, he said, oh, I don't know if you've heard of this guy, my friend, his name is Glen Grant. And so, we would do that tour all the time. My cousin and I mainly danced and one weekend, Keoni couldn't make it and Glen was in a panic—I don't know your part of the tour, what am I supposed to do. And Keoni says, oh, Lopaka knows it, you know, he can do it. And so that's basically how it started, after that he called and asked, you know, more stuff to do, would you mind? And so it eventually, evolved into being mentored to basically take over the tour. You know, the thing about being trained by Glen Grant and learning from him, is documentation, research, and he actually said to me, I can get away with mispronouncing Hawaiian names and other things, he says, because I'm haole, so people expect me to make mistakes, but he says, you as a Hawaiian? One mistake you make, your own people will crucify you. So, he said, it's harder for you than it is for me, so you have to get your facts straight.

### **But he was a professor so he would have to get his science right.**

Absolutely, so, I remember I made a mistake about a legend about Pele, and uh, Koko Head Crater, and in front of a room full of people, he got up and told me I was wrong. And he said, what are you doing? You didn't research that. He goes, don't do that again.

### **Glen Grant described himself as a Jewish guy from...**

From Hollywood.

### **Oh Hollywood, that's right, I can see your cultural interest but what was his?**

Glen's story was when he moved here he was living in a dilapidated old, beat up house, on University between these high rise condominiums and again, the short story is immediately after they moved in, things started to happen, uh, roommate is taking a shower and he sees his girlfriend coming towards the shower curtain, he opens it, he's got soap in his eyes and someone slaps him in the face and he turns around, no one's in the shower, no one's in the bathroom because it's locked. Things being thrown around the kitchen and so they finally call a landlord over and explain to her what's going on and she says to them, oh, I'm so sorry, I forget to tell you, before you come to this place, uh, some lady live here, her husband fool around, she hang herself in the kitchen, she hate men, so sorry.

**That would've been nice to know earlier.**

Yeah, so, Glen is telling me this in the old store and he says shortly after that, all those guys that were his roommates, one by one they were all killed in car accidents and he had a '55 Chevy Belair station wagon and when it got creamed by this truck, like 2 o'clock in the morning, he just walked away with a scar. So, he's the only one who survived and that peaked his interest in uh, ghosts in Hawai'i. Primarily it started to be Japanese ghosts and then it became Hawaiian, Portuguese, and all the other cultures. And so, he even admitted himself that he was a big chicken, first one probably to run if anything happened.

**Before this career there was another one, could you tell us about that?**

Oh my god. I can't believe, ok...um, I had a career as a...as a professional wrestler for 17 years, when I was still working for Glen Grant, I was still doing this, it was towards the end of my career, it wasn't becoming fun anymore, and um, his secretary, when I'd tell her listen, I've got something this Saturday, like a match or something, don't book a tour, she'd book it anyway, and we always figured it out. But one weekend, I could not get out of the tour and I could not get out of wrestling the match. So, I had to figure something out, so I got on the bus and before I got on the bus, I called the booker at the venue and I said, listen man, I'm stuck, what are we going to do? The booker says, I don't know. I said, ok, let's do this, I'm gonna bring my tour to the venue and I'm gonna do the match and instead of the main event, make the match first. And he says, ok. And I said, but, I'm gonna bring my tour with me. And he's like, oh man, I don't know about that...it worked out. So, I got on the bus and I said, listen everybody, we're going to this venue, it's a professional wrestling match, when the bus pulls up, you guys get out, go to the front door, sit in the front row. I'm gonna uh, run into the ring, beat the guy up, I'm gonna win the match, and then you go back to the bus and we'll do the tour. And that's exactly how it happened, I run in, beat the guy up, 1-2-3, get the belt, run out, people go on the bus, finally get out to the bus and get in and I'm looking at

everybody and I get on the mic and I said, so, is anybody gonna give me a hard time? No, no...then you know, big round of applause.

**Lopaka Kapanui says his knowledge of Hawaiian history and culture and the supernatural have come about through research and his own experiences as well as the encounter of others who share their stories with him.**

**Do you believe in ghosts? Do you believe that there are actually ghosts? And what are they?**

A ghost is uh, something that's residual, that's a recording that just plays itself back during certain times.

**And where did it come from? It died and then part of it is left? I mean...**

I have to honestly say it's like working for the State and the joke is you work for the State, you die, no heaven or hell, you go back to work. So, a ghost is someone who's been in a place for a certain amount of time and some part of them is still there, they've made some sort of impression of themselves. Like a psychic thumbprint.

**Deliberately? Or this just happens?**

Yeah, it just happens, you know, not intentional. And so, when you see a ghost, you're seeing a recording, you know, an imprint of an event that's happened in the past. Uh, when you see an apparition, an apparition is aware, it's cognizant. It knows it's not here anymore, it knows it's not human, but it's here for some reason, some unfinished business. And so, if it senses that you're psychic, it wants to communicate with you.

**And what's the downside of communication?**

The downside of communication is sometimes it leaves marks. Fingertip bruise marks, scratches, sometimes no matter where you go, you will hear a voice calling your name, you know, and it won't stop until you answer the phone call, so to say. It's trying to get through all this stuff to get the message across. And so that's where uh, misunderstanding takes place and people think it's evil, it's demonic, but really, it's just communication.

**So there is, there are no ghosts that will harass you and drive you to your death?**

Not that I know of. I've never heard of anyone yet, losing their life because of an encounter with something otherworldly. According to Hollywood and reality shows, it might happen, but in real life...not so much.

**And there are ghosts of every ethnicity and background around the world?**

Oh, absolutely, especially here in Hawai'i. I mean, you may not believe it, but the most famous ghost story here in Hawaii is a Japanese ghost story.

**Which one is that?**

The woman with no face.

**Tell us the story.**

So, the short story is 19, uh, 1956, the Wai'alae Drive Inn.

**Yes, that's the one. Ok, that's the obake in the restroom, right?**

In the women's restroom. Uh, the double feature was Love Sways in the Amazon and Monolith Monsters, according to the article from Bob Krauss, who was a great guy, and it's the intermission, the woman goes to the bathroom, doing her business she says she sees a woman in a white summer yukata come up to the sink, wash her hands, and the woman says when she looks in the mirror, the lady takes her hair back like this, has no face.

**That is really spooky.**

Yes, and so, to fast forward that event, uh, today that ghost is still haunting that area.

**There's no drive inn anymore.**

There's no drive inn, but there's a Times Supermarket. And she's been seen in the walk-in freezer, and the employee bathroom, and there was also a shopping mall. After the drive inn was demolished in '94, she had nowhere to go. So, she went to Times Supermarket, and then the mall, and so, she's been seen in the women's downstairs bathroom at the mall, uh, at a department store and the 8-plex theatre. So, she's still around. Apparently, she's haunting theatre number six.

**Why is it not okay to take pork over the Pali, according to legend?**

According to the legend, and this is the short version, Pele and Kamapua'a were once boyfriend and girlfriend.

**Ok, she's the Fire Goddess, he's the Pig God.**

Right, right, and so, even though they were in this relationship, Kamapua'a has not changed his ways and so he's out cavorting and Pele finds out and one afternoon he's



coming home and he says, what a wonderous sight, a tidal wave coming from the mountain, and he realizes it's a tidal wave of lava, he says, oh my god, she found out. And so he's running for his life, Pāpa'ikou, Puna, Pana'ewa, and a hill outside of Hilo called Kauku is where the pig god lies flat and begins to pray and the Hilo rain, the Ua Kani Lehua begins to fall, they say roots from grey trees rise up and hold back the lava, the lake of fire, and finally, when it's all cooled off, they say Pele appears and says, well, I can't kill you, so what are we going to do. He says, let's make this agreement that from this moment forward, the Ko'olau side of the island, the Windward side is mine, lush, green with rain and the Kona side of every island will be yours—hot, arid, dry. And none shall cross into the other's territory. And Pele says, a ō 'ia, agreed. And so, if there's any truth to this, it is really that you can't bring pork from the Windward to the Leeward side. But to be more specific, you can bring pork through the H-3, the Wilson, the Pali tunnels, but you can't bring it up that road at the Pali Lookout, that's coming from the Windward, because technically, there's a road at the Pali Lookout that crosses that meridian that makes it Leeward. I will send you a picture of someone who brought pork, over the Pali, coming from that side. It's someone who unknowingly thought he was doing a good thing by making an offering, but come to find out his offering was pork to the pig god, which I later on told him, you realize you're making an offering of pork to the pig god, do you understand that? And he says, why? Does it make a difference? I said, it's like offering a mother her own children. Under his hand, in this picture, you see a green swirling mist, like this...um, I actually had to go back 4 o'clock in the morning to do prayers of apology for that guy and supplication. Because on these adventures, I'm pretty familiar with ghosts and spirits and other things, but a lot of times, it's foolish people that worry me.

**Are there certain pathways or interject points that are known for ghosts?**

Yeah, they're called ao kuewa, and the ao kuewa is an opening between worlds where after you die, your spirit is escorted to the next world by your family 'aumakua.

**What about the jumping off places? There's several on the islands. One of them is at Mokulē'ia by Ka'ena Point, and then Maui has one known as the jumping off place for souls?**

Yes, that's Kahekili's Leap, the other one we're talking about is, leina a ka 'uhane at um, right on the cusp of Mokulē'ia and Ka'ena. Another one is Kalaeloa, Barber's Point, and yet, another one is now the cafeteria of Moanalua High School, and so that's another leaping place and Moanalua High School used to be on my list of the three most haunted public schools on the island but it's fallen off since King Intermediate has taken its place.

**Because of what happened there before?**

Mainly because of the history, for instance uh, 'Aiea High School, the famous battle of Kaeokulani and Kalanikūpule months before the battle of Nu'uaniu, it takes place from 'Aiea High School all the way to where Pali Momi is. The unfortunate thing about that battle is when Kalanikūpule wins the battle over his uncle, every warrior that's been slain on the uncle's side, they've all been left, out in the open, they have not been given the proper burial of respect. And that's uh, the sign of disrespect and so the large majority of that is the grounds of 'Aiea High School, the part of that freeway that always has accidents, Ka'ahumanu, Kaonohi overpass, which happen to be night-marcher trails. And so, the trauma that has caused by an incident makes a psychic thumbprint on the environment and depending on the kind of people who are around the area determines as to if that trauma becomes residual or cognizant. And so, what we're talking about when we say residual is a-a-an event just repeating itself, it's not aware that you're there. Cognizant means the event is aware that it's passed away, it's aware that it's not human, and when it becomes aware of us, it wants to interact and communicate and that's when hauntings happen.

**So many people think this is all balderdash, it's just, you know, ridiculous. How do you explain to them that why you know this is true?**

What I always tell them is, give me a chance to change your mind. Spend some time with me, come to the event, come listen, and give me a chance, give me that opportunity to change your mind. You don't have to like it, uh, I would encourage that you at least respect it, but that's the first thing I say, let me change your mind, and they usually end up becoming believers at the end.

**We close this program with a spooky story that Lopaka Kapanui told a group at a Japanese cemetery in Mō'ili'ili, O'ahu during a full moon on the night of a Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Mahalo to Robert Lopaka Kapanui of Kaimuki, O'ahu for sharing your life stories and chicken skin accounts with us, and thank you for joining us. Aloha nui.**

There was a teacher and one night she's home, sitting at the kitchen table, correcting papers and she's sort of watching TV, and all of a sudden, the TV screen goes...white poltergeist and the wind suddenly dies and the sound is gone. And from behind the house, somewhere near the mango tree, she hears the tinkling sound of the chimes. Dum, dum, dum, and it's coming around the house outside her bedroom, the bathroom, coming around from the living room, dum, dum, dum, and now coming up the steps, ding, ding, and she tries to get up to see what the source of the sound is, but she cannot move. Something is holding her down at the kitchen table. Not even her head can move, only her eyes can record the front door. chimes in return, there's a skeletal fist with flesh falling off of it, and it walks into her living room, skeletal remains of a woman in a faded bloodied white kimono, clumps of hair are falling off of her skull, teeth bare, and she stands just in sight of the front door in the living room and she says, leave my house now.

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