TITLE: Ed Greevy
LSS 1308 (26:46)
FIRST AIR DATE: 6/9/2020

I was a pushy haole. When I came back here to live, I realized it wouldn't be...I changed myself to a great degree and my son thinks I've got...I've dropped back too far, but anyway, I learned that if you want to be accepted in this community of local people, you can't be pushy, just, they're not gonna accept you, so I sort of trained myself. And at the same time, I developed a technique of listening.

For more than four decades, he has documented political struggles and the modern Hawaiian sovereignty movement. Met this activist photographer, next on Long Story Short.

> One on one engaging conversations with some of Hawaiʻi's most intriguing people, Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox.

Aloha mai kākou, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Ed Greevy of Honolulu, witnessed and photographed many of the key moments of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement and many other political protests in Hawaiʻi. The height of his documentation took place in the 1970s through the 1990s at events such as the Land Development protests at Kalama Valley in East Oʻahu and Waihole-Waikane in Windward, Oʻahu. The evictions at Sand Island in Honolulu and the beach preservation efforts led by Save Our Surf. His role in capturing these powerful moments of civil disobedience and protest was not his career, but it became his life's calling. Ed Greevy grew up in the town of Hawthorne, a suburb of Los Angeles, to parents of radically opposing political views.

My father was a life-long Democrat and a union member and he told me, he said, he said, I'm a Democrat, I've always been a Democrat, I always vote Democrat, no matter who they put on the ballot, and sometimes they put dogs on the ballot and I vote for the dogs. My mother was a homemaker and a small business person and she was also an ardent racist herself and admirer of Adolf Hitler, we had a lot of arguments about that. I wasn't political at the time, when I was going to school. She lived in Hawthorne, but she was very active in right-wing politics in Hawthorne.

With that disparity in their opinion, how did that affect the marriage?

Well, what my dad told me years later...they didn't have a lot of arguments, my dad didn't talk much, and my dad had warned her after the war broke out, it was somewhat dangerous to a spouse, any kind of Nazi or Japanese sentiment positive things, so he told, basically, they agreed that she would keep her mouth shut during the war.

The marriage was a partnership between people with very different views and uh, were you close to your mother?

I can't say I was, because when I got old enough to understand...we didn't have political discussions when I was ten, that's when they divorced. My mother divorced my father to marry my father's childhood friend.

And when they divorced, who did you live with?

My father.

Did you choose?

My sister went to...no, he didn't know right away, she wouldn't tell...she says, I want a divorce, and um, she wouldn't tell him why. And then, one day, he unexpectedly showed up at her work site and there was his friend standing beside her car, leaning in and kissing her, and he said instantly he knew why she wanted a...he knew...and he tried to kill him, he tried to run him over with his car. Didn't. Got out and beat the hell out of him. The police came, it was a big scene. So, it was a very bitter divorce and it...I didn't know it at the time, but it affected my relationships later with women, too.

Lack of trust? Is that what it produced?

I didn't always treat women as well as I do now, put it that way. Whether it was a lack of trust...I wasn't aware of it until a shrink told me when I was 18.

After high school, Ed Greevy enrolled at the University of Southern California with an interest in engineering, however, his life on-campus did not go well.

Well, I joined a fraternity because I needed a place to live and I didn't do my homework well enough. I just knew fraternities were a good thing to do when you're in college. It was kind of part of the college experience. So, I joined ATO, Alpha Tau Omega, which turned out to be a Southern-based fraternity, that had in its charter, found out later, that they would only accept as members, white Christian males, and after I'd become active, after I'd become, after the first semester, I made my grades and I was inducted into the fraternity, they sent me out on a lunch date to pick up a guy who had a Latino name, and it was in the neighborhood, they said, you know, he signed up to rush. There was something wrong, I couldn't find the address, the guy, nothing. So, I came back, when I came back into the lunch room, everybody stopped, you know, where's so and so, and I explained, there was a bad number, whatever, it doesn't exist, I couldn't...so, the guy that had recruited me, who was a football player and a senior, who I looked up to because he had recruited me, he was sitting there, and he goes back to eating and he says, that's ok, Ed, we don't need any more spics around here, and he wasn't joking. But that was the first time I'd ever really run up against racism and it really bothered me that a guy that I looked up to and had recruited me was a racist.

After one year, Ed Greevy left USC to escape his pledge to the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity. Greevy enrolled at Long Beach State University where he took up an interest in surfing and majored in political science. As a part of his college program, he worked in a nearby city government office, however, there too, his experience fell short of his ideals.

Two days a week I worked in West City of Westminster, it was nearby Long Beach, in order to get this public administration thing, I would work actually in a small government, either at Long Beach or at one of the surrounding towns, two days a week, they paid me, I worked there. But I was learning how government really works, and in my second semester at Westminster, my boss, the city administrator, the mayor and two councilmen were all arrested and indicted and convicted of zone change bribery. And my teachers were just, like, that's not what Ed's supposed to be learning, so I was really turned off to government, and I never used the degree in government. I never had a government job.

And at that point, is that when you became the young adventurer who came to Hawai'i?

Well, I'd already been to Hawaii my sophomore year after I went to Long Beach. I lived in a dorm, some guys were going there on a...surfers, I didn't surf at the time but I was interested. So, I went with them in my sophomore year for one semester in January of 1960, and I became hooked on surfing and I arranged my life, other than school, being able to surf in Hawaii and in California. So, when I graduated in January of '62, the next day, I was on a plane back to Hawaii because I wanted to surf big waves, North Shore. I got a job at Outrigger, and um, I soon didn't like, I realized restaurant management is not in my future, so I wanted to...look around at other jobs. I worked for awhile for a commercial photography studio, um, his name...Hawaii Camera, I think it was called. It was all their equipment they furnished me, they had a darkroom, they were the biggest commercial studio. But they furnished you, me, all the equipment and film and I just had to develop it and they had someone else do the printing, whatever, and they would send me out and basically the job was to make condos look good. But I would wander, like, I'd be downtown on a job and I would see some kids playing in front of a business or some...anyway, I would photograph, but I was doing it on their time and their film. And so, my boss came to me and said, you were there to photograph this hotel. Who are these people on these park benches in downtown Honolulu, how, how does that work? Well, I just saw them. So, I realized commercial photography was probably not my...anyway, I got fired from that job.

Needing to find a steady job, Ed Greevy left Hawai'i and moved to New York and worked in insurance claims. While he was there, his interest in surfing and photography grew into a short-lived business venture with his then-brother-in-law.

So, my sister was in New York, worked for an insurance company, and she said they'll hire you as a management trainee, they'll reimburse you for your law...I also wanted to go to law school, which I did in New York, and I found that boring and I only did a year and a half out of four years, night program. So, my brother in law wanted to start a business on the side, he was an art director at a big agency. He wanted a second income and he looked at my surf magazines at the time in the mid-60s and said uh, surfing was starting to boom on the east coast and demographically way bigger than the west coast. So, we decided there was no surf magazine on the east coast, we would start one, which we did.

Ed Greevy's surfing magazine and insurance work in New York lasted just a few years and he found himself moving back to Hawai'i in 1970. One day a colleague from another surfing magazine reached out to Greevy to see if he could dig up some information about an organization called, Save Our Surf, or SOS, a grassroots group led by Honolulu surfer turned activist, John Kelly, with the mission of protecting threatened surf breaks.

And somehow or another, my friend in San Diego had heard about Save Our...he wanted to know more about it. So, the next day I was at a camera store, so, I was there for photography reason and I see a poster for Save Our Surf, so I called up the number. It was John Kelly's house, and he said...I told him, I have a friend who's a surfing magazine editor, he wants to know. He says, we're meeting next Tuesday or whatever, come on out to the house. The first meeting that I went to at the Kelly house, they had a treasurer's report, they were getting ready for their first big demo at the Capital and they had ten dollars or less in the bank, and I thought, these guys ain't going anywhere. But they didn't express any concern about where...they knew how to raise money, that was not a problem. John developed a theory, if you had an event and you wanted a certain number of people there, you had to print and distribute at least 25 fliers to get one person to come to your event, whatever it was, but the other 20...but there'd be another 25 that wanted to come but couldn't. So, it was very...so the more you printed of a flyer announcing where and when, the more people would come. But you had to distribute, you couldn't just put them in a dumpster somewhere, you had to...and that was where the kids came in, they would go door-to-door. I don't know if you've ever done door-to-door canvassing for politics? It's really hard work. A lot of people will sic a dog on you, or invite you in for lunch, you never know what you're going to get, but you get a lot of...I'm not interested. Anyway, so, the kids would do the door-to-door stuff. they were fighting beach expansion in Waikiki.

More beaches, so, and what was the problem with expanding the beaches?

Well, the area that they had chosen was called, is called Baby Queens...because internationally, tourism was just booming in this, in this, this is the early 70s. The tourist industry was complaining, they still complain, that there's very little actual sand beach in Waikiki, the world's most famous...

And did surfers believe that would change their surf break? Was that the problem?

Yes, with paved...

Ok so...

Because at that time, in the early 70s, there were still a lot of local people living in Waikiki, I don't know how it is now. It became too expensive. Their kids, and this was mostly Hawaiian kids, were learning to surf at Baby Queens, but hardly anybody knew that. But it was a safe area out of the canoes...it was not, it didn't collide with the canoes or the other surfers, it was this little area that they wanted to put sand there and Save Our Surf, had already organized over other issues, but had sort of gone dormant because there were no issues until the early 70s and John got 'em going again. I've only met, in my lifetime, a few people who really understand where photography fits into life, and he was one of them. So, he used to carry a camera and at the first big demonstration in '71, he would step away from the microphone and the podium and document what was going on. So, I saw that and I had a little studio at the time and I approached him and said, you know, I'm not an organizer but I can help you with the photography. And I became his sort-of field photographer because he had a printing press under his house. He always used to tell me, the only free press is the one you own. And there's some truth to that. And that started a mentoring relationship that lasted until he died, with him and his wife, Marianne, to some degree, more between me and him. I always paid for my own black and white film and development, because I wanted to own it, which I still do.

And you were doing all of this for free because...

I thought it was a bad idea to destroy surf sites for uh, tourism, um, because just building hotels on beaches is kind of permanent and I just thought...and I'd been a surfer, it was like, that's just not a good idea. And the money ratio of people that had to be evicted compared to the hotels and the banking industry and all of these development related people, was just unfair. And I had cameras and I had an interest. And like I said earlier, from when I would wander off the job, it just, was interesting to document how people actually lived. And these people do not have power because they do not have money, and so, somebody has to help them get information. And that's one of the main things that John taught me, was the role of an activist is to help people like that get information that they don't have access to in their normal life's activities, and then help them develop a plan and go do it.

Ed Greevy of Honolulu said he began to expand his documentation of environmental causes to land development resistance and protests centered on the displacement of local communities and Hawaiian culture. Little did he know, he would be capturing the early days of the modern Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

So there came a time when the legislature approved the sewage plant money, the park money, all around the same time, and they backed off of the widening of Kuhio Beach. So, SOS, the major battles that had held them together were over. So, I remember the meeting, he said, you know, we won here, we won there, you're free to do whatever you...you can go back to what you were doing before, um, but there's a new struggle, it's going to be evictions, and I'm recommending that as many of you as can, stay involved, the people that you will find you're on the other side of these issues of evictions are the same ones that you found, that you were at odds with in the surf struggles, in the tourism industry, banks, and construction companies, anyway, so he made this speech about, you can go back to what you were doing, or you can help these people that are being evicted by very powerful forces, including landowners...because Chinatown was a hot area, Waiahole had started, Kalama Valley was the first one, and I just thought, wow...and then he would send me to Kalama...just go out there and take some pictures. I developed a method. I would only go into communities where I was invited. I would not go with somebody who wasn't accepted because I was an outsider and I would always be an outsider, but if I was with somebody who was known in the community and people could see that we were friends, I would get candid...I didn't want posed pictures, they would accept me and I always...I learned later, I got the best pictures on the first day in the community, because the second time I was there, people knew who I was and wanted to talk about whatever. Well, if you're talking, you can't work, so I...I wanted to remain to some degree, a stranger, so that I could do the work.

And in those days, I think people may not remember this or know this, but of course there weren't cell phones snapping photos anywhere...

No, there were no cell phones.

But also, the camera...people really didn't have nice cameras back then.

Instamatics.

Instamatics, right.

And Instamatics would produce a reasonably acceptable, color, four by six print, but if you converted that, because everything was printing was black-and-white, was terrible. And only a few people even owned it, of the people that I was becoming involved with, not even very many owned Instamatics, much less a Nikon.

So, your role in taking these pictures that were so evocative, that captured people's spirits and, and, and, just the emotion of these protests was just invaluable at the time. And to this day...

Well, I would get calls. John Kelly's fame spread, so if you were living on Lana'i, let's say, or Molokai, one of the neighbor islands, and suddenly, somebody wanted to kick you out of your house and build a high-rise or something like that, and you didn't have the money to put out your...you had lived there eight generations or something, you weren't able to communicate to the outside world, because you didn't have money. But people, there would people that would go around, activists, they were called, who got some political understanding and would volunteer to help these people resist whatever, and it was mostly evictions in those days, and within that community, there were a few printing presses that would print progressive material, John was a key player.

Because commercial printers would often turn down the...

Oh, they wouldn't print it. They wouldn't print anything...

sentiment...

They wouldn't print anything political...didn't matter...

Anything?

Nothing. Well, I think the modern sovereignty Hawaiian movement was born in Kalama Valley, yeah, I think it was. Because initially, the group that formed there was called Kokua Kalama, it was not Kokua Hawaii, it was Kokua Kalama, help Kalama, and after a while of the stand-off and activists were...people were becoming...they were all rookies, nobody had experiences, except maybe John Kelly, because he was involved. Anyways, so Kalama Valley, technically, was a loss because they paved it over with upper-middle class housing, but a lot of people stayed involved and got their teething. And they changed the name from Kokua Kalama to Kokua Hawaii because they saw them, they saw the movement as an island-wide, uh, nation, uh, state-wide thing, not just Kalama Valley.

And fast-forwarding all these years later, uh, now we're seeing, we're seeing huge activism at Mauna Kea, um...

A direct link, Kalama Valley, in my understanding in being here, was the first time in modern times that the whole issue of whose really sovereign here, whose laws really count, and I read all these articles about...that the newspapers favors TMT and there's a lot of...even some Hawaiians favor it, and they always cite the law, it's the law, they've passed, they've gotten approvals from all these different agencies over the last...well, whose law they applying? In my view, we're still guests, this is, there was never any official voicing by the Hawaiian people, who invented a culture here, language, everything that goes with, because they were the first ones here, they were never given a choice as to whether to give all that up and be part of the United States or not.

You ever thought what a really different life you've had, uh, a kid who grew up in L.A. who comes, you make your life in Hawai'i, you don't leave once you get here for real, and um, and then you're documenting the struggles of the host culture, and it's a long struggle, and uh, and a lot of the people that you know so well are no longer with you.

Well, so at 80, you know, life is mostly behind me. Photography, has never gripped me. In my view, photographs are only as good as the people can see them. I mean, if they're sitting in a drawer somewhere, what good are they?

Are you saying, though, that photography never became your calling? It sounds like it might of...

Well, it did but not out of...it never became as overpoweringly: this is my career. I've never really made a living out of it. I've never made any great amount of money out of it. It's been a hobby. But anyway, I've never really settled in like, oh, photography is my life, but it's turned out that way.

At the time of this conversation in the Fall of 2019, Ed Greevy possessed a collection of more than 100,000 images that documented resistance, protest, and change during his 40 plus years in Hawai'i. When asked about his favorite photographs, Greevy was quick to point out his exploding helmet picture, an image of a young Hawaiian man demonstrating at the State Capitol. You can find the photo on the cover of Haunani Kay Trask's book, Kue: Thirty Years of Land Struggle in Hawai'i. Ed Greevy is the father of a previous Long Story Short guest, Hoala Greevy, an entrepreneur who leads internet data encyption at his San Francisco based company, PauBox. Mahalo to Ed Greevy of Makiki in Honolulu for sharing his story. And thank you for joining us for this edition of Long Story Short on PBS Hawai'i. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha nui.

Through a long process of education as to what actually happened in the overthrow and the actual relationship of large landowners and the laws and what have you, the Hawaiian community in particular has leaped forward, I mean, you ask just a regular Hawaiian who's not involved in TMT, but they understand issues they didn't understand 30 years ago. They didn't know about.

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