

- Bob: My name is, uh, Robert Turner, that's t u r n e r, Penton, p e n t o n, Jr. All right. Mm-hmm.
- dindria: <affirmative>. And, um, the date for today?
- Bob: Today's date is June 1st, 2022. Ooh.
- dindria: Time is moving. Um, and then we are located in the Digital Media Lab of the Main Branch of the Tacoma Public Library. Yes. Um, alright, let's begin. Name some of the places, people, and things you call home.
- Bob: You know, I thought about that, and I think the first place that I [00:01:00] yet consider my home is a place called Bogalusa, Louisiana. Uh, Bogalusa, spelled b o g a l u s a. Many people never heard of it, but let me give you just a, a little history of it where it's located. If you look on the map on the US map, that's the only state that is shaped like a, a boot. Right? Well, in the tip of that boot is Bogalusa, which would be north about 61 miles north of New Orleans. So that's where, that's one of the places I call home. And I say that because that's where I was born in 1947 on December the 11th. And I know that because my mother used to, uh, before she passed a couple of years ago, she would always rehearse my birth, even when she spent about three years in the, um, in University Place here in Tacoma, um, uh, rehab home.
- Bob: Anyway, every time I would go and visit her, she would tell me, Robert, you're the only one out of seven, your seven siblings that was born at home in the house. And I was born in, in a little place that used to be called a shotgun house. Okay? Many people don't know about shotgun houses, but they still exist. They're more prominent now in New Orleans, actually. But they're long shape, almost just like a hall or room with no bedrooms. And that's how it got its name. Because if you would aim a gun from the front door, it would go straight, you know, coming out of the back door.
- Bob: And it's no twists and turns, no twists and turns, no rooms. You know, they did have bedrooms that they made, you know, with curtains separating the different rooms with petitions or whatever. But I was born there in, in that shotgun house. And my mother said it was about midnight. And, uh, no, well, my father was there, but he had ran out looking for public telephone. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, and remember, this was the pre-civil rights era. And, uh, so he braved the, the risk of, uh, you know, being caught or hung because he had to go on the other side of the track, which was known as the white people side of the track. And while he was gone, uh, when he first left, he, my mom said she, yeah, he left the door open. And she said that was one of the coolest days she could ever remember, you know, because it was, you know, it was in December, of course, okay.
- Bob: But it was just colder than usual. That was significant because that house, a shotgun house never did have a insulation. You know, it was just built, you know, with a tin roof and so forth and so on. But she said there she was laying in the middle of the bed, you know, and then the contraction. I eventually came out and I came out on the floor with

the umbilical cord twisted around my neck. Oh my goodness. And she said, all of a sudden, this was a miraculous thing because one of the, um, members of the church, an older lady just happened to show up. Can you believe that <laugh>, she showed up. She knew, and she knew, and she was, became the midwife. She severed the umbilical cord, and, uh, she found a pair of overalls, and she made a blanket, and they cleaned me up, and here I am.

Bob: All right, <laugh>. So I really called Bogalusa my home, because Bogalusa was known for the highest percentage of Ku Klux Klans, you know, than any other city or state, you know, Louisiana. Um, and I've had some experience. I remember just kind of fast forward all the way from middle school to high school. One of the things we've, I've never had a new textbook. It was all hand-me-downs from the white schools. Right. And, but I was a guy that used to sit out of the window, I mean, look out the window, kind of just looking far away for places better than, you know, my environment. And I long for that. And I remember, um, just this feeling of really being disenchanted, you know, couldn't really speak out on those issues that I knew was wrong. Like the signs that say white only or going into the back of the restaurant, you know, or working for a white family, but never could go in to use the facilities, to a restroom to relieve myself.

Bob: You know, you have to look for whatever. But I think, you know, out of that, I remember one day I was kind of going through a magazine, I think it would maybe look for the Times magazine there. I saw a quote by John F. Kennedy that said, "act not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." All of a sudden I had this sensation, boy, I can do something. And I remember, uh, later on looking at a brochure, and in that brochure it talks, it was volunteers and service to America VISTA. And that's what really spoke to me. You know, I resonated with that, that with the quote, I found, you know, this is something I want to be involved in. And I submitted my application and I was off to Los Angeles. <Wow.> Yeah. Serving in the, uh, domestic Peace Corps.

dindria: All right. So you moved from Louisiana mm-hmm. <affirmative> to California.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: All right. How did you get there?

Bob: How did I get there?

dindria: Yeah, how did you go across the nation?

Bob: <laugh> Oh, well, because, well, in VISTA, at that time, it was based upon, you know, where they thought you may fit, okay. In terms of your expertise and your character, whatever. But they determined that, and they sent me to South Central LA. It was shortly after the riots in the Six, in, I think it was '65. I was there in '67, but I was working as a community organizer in, uh, South Central LA. And, um, still the flames of the riot was still there, and all the sentiments. And I heard the, the sounds of the Black Panther movement and all the other, you know, um, organizations that was really speaking out,

you know, for justice or, or about injustice. But for, you know, trying to bring, um, improve the quality of life to people. But what really attracted me was the fact that, wow, I've never heard this before, coming from Louisiana.

Bob: Yeah. You know, they spoke to how I felt, and in a sense, I really felt like this is, this really changed somewhat the trajectory of my life, because I joined the Black Panthers, and, uh, I became one of the ministers of information. You know, of course we had quite a few ministers, you know, but my role was to kinda read a lot of information and be able to really digest it and disseminate it into the community that was germane for, you know, for, for that community. So that's what I did. But, you know, I had adopted a slogan coming from LA, Louisiana Yeah. <laugh> to the big LA different, you know, <laugh>. And I, when I first arrived there, I remember saying, boy, the greater part of my neighborhood is called, was all good. I say, what demon has possessed me to be so good for so long. I actually thought, you know, now I can speak out, you know, why didn't I do it? You know? And I know now why, because my mom, my mother was afraid that if I do, you know, I would not be alive very long. So, but in LA I think that's the other place I really call, had some feeling of like, this is home. You know, this is different. This is a new start for me. Right. And that's what I did.

dindria: Oh my goodness. Um, I wanna dig deeper into these stories. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> about mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, Bogalusa.

dindria: Bogalusa. Bogalusa. Yes. Let me get it right. Yes.

dindria: Yes. Um, [00:10:30] and then, um, how you came across to, um, South Central LA mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I can tell there are a lot of stories in there. Um, yeah. So, but what I'm really interested in is how did you get to Tacoma, Washington?

Bob: Great. <laugh>. Well, after serving about, uh, a little over a year in, in LA as a VISTA volunteer, Volunteers In Service To America, they asked me did I want to consider, you know, another year. And because they had a, a live project waiting for me in Tacoma, and I... Oh, they said in Washington at first, and I never heard of, Yeah. <laugh>, I thought it was referencing Washington, DC <laugh>. Yeah. I had never, you know, who goes to come up to the Northwest, didn't know anything about it, but they specifically said Tacoma, Washington. And, um, there, I, um, that was kind of my ticket leaving LA you know, to fulfill my next year in, in Tacoma. So I landed on the east side of Tacoma. And, uh, what was known at that time as the Salishan Housing, you know, a lot of people didn't realize, but Salishan at that time was the largest public housing west of the Mississippi, which is to include Los Angeles and San, uh, San Diego or San Francisco. But it was roughly about 844 units of public housing, Yeah. In Salishan. But I was, uh, assigned to that community under the anti-poverty program that they had at that time.

dindria: So what did you do in Salishan?

Bob: Oh my goodness.

dindria: Yeah. Like, what does it mean to be...

Bob: Well, you know, the first thing I remember, you know, looking odd, because I, I still had the afro hair style, and I brought that too. I like to say that I introduced that <laugh>, the afro, to the community. No one had ever seen an afro in, in '67. And, um, but I soon really began to develop relationships. And by the way, I think for me, you know, that was really key. You know, I, I, um, began to, um, talk to people, but people referred me to one of their local barbershops, or the barber. Yes. You know, I went to Virgil Barbershop on Portland Avenue. It's gone now, but, and I learned everything I needed to know about the community. <laugh>. I mean, that is always the central place to go. Um, but he told me about, you know, the needs and the, and the community. And what really struck me was, um, there was no community center at all.

Bob: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, there was no community center. There was no place for young people to congregate, you know, to have fun or whatever, sports or whatever. So me and my wife, we put together a survey, you know, of survey, and we canvassed the community, asking them what did they want to see. And of course, a service center, a multi-service center was the first thing you know, which out of that needs assessment, we wrote for a grant. And we received a grant to start the Eastside Neighborhood Center. Yes. And they've changed many, many times. But right there on 44th and, uh, and, uh, Portland Avenue, that site used to be a warehouse. <Oh.> An old warehouse. And we, first, we saw meeting there, you know, with the young people. And then after the grant was approved, that's when they began to erect the, the East Side Neighborhood Center.

Bob: Yes. Out of that many things began to really forge, because after meeting the, many of the young people, we met their parents. And the parents would always talk about, um, you know, the high cost of food in that area. I think they only had one supermarket over on 40th and, uh, Portland Avenue, I believe. So what we did, we organized families and came up with the East Side Buyers Club, or the cooperative, and we had roughly about 240 families involved. <Wow.> And really, it was like a small-scale Costco <laugh> at that time, because we would buy bulk, we would also buy directly from the farmers. We would, um, cut out the, the retailer and go directly to the whole sellers or whatever. And, um, so about 200 and some families were involved in that on a, on a regular basis. They paid \$5 membership. Yeah. And they, um, would, you know, come to that warehouse where we stored the food or the staples, and, uh, they would break out the portion that they ordered. If it's a case, they would, but they needed, you know, just for a family of four, they would, um, you know, do that.

dindria: Oh, that's amazing. I, I have no, I, I'm trying to think of what I know of the Salishan area right now mm-hmm <affirmative> and how some of those things that you're saying are still needs.

Bob: Yes, yes.

Community Archive Center Oral History Project Transcript
Rev. Bob Penton, Interview date: 6/1/2022

- dindria: Um, but then how things have changed. And just thinking of the Old East Side Community Center mm-hmm. <affirmative>, who knows how many iterations it was by the time I got there.
- Bob: Exactly. Yeah.
- dindria: But that you were having your own Costco in Salishan. That's good. Yes.
- Bob: Yes.
- dindria: That's amazing. Um,
- Bob: Well, even for the youth now, sorry. Plus even for the youth, we, um, the other need that came from the needs assessment, again, as it was for, um, employment for the youth summer jobs. So we acquired a grant to, um, facilitate jobs for the youth in that community for summer jobs. We came up with the East Side Beautification or Salishan Beautification Project. All right. And we began to look at Swan Creek, behind Lister, and we began to build little trails and park benches. All the youth did that. And, uh, it was amazing, you know, how creative they were, you know, and building those type of structures and, and, um, for their own use and for trails in the, um, in the Swan Creek.
- dindria: That's beautiful. Um, I remember when I was teaching at McIlvaigh before it was First Creek. Yes. Um, we would do kind of tours of, uh, Swan Creek.
- Bob: Yes. They call it the Gulch at the time. Yes. <laugh>. Yeah.
- dindria: They would call it the Gulch. Um, and, you know, it's nature, so it grows and it changes and, and moves. Um, and so it was about making sure that we keep it beautiful. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, keep the garbage out of there and then like, um, recover some of the trails.
- Bob: Yes. So, yes.
- dindria: Yes. I mean, because I mean, it sounds like you did a lot of work for that, the summer program there mm-hmm. <affirmative> with the youth. Um, and then if you don't continue to maintain it, then they get lost. Yes. So, um, I could see that that's why we had to go in there and, and kind of re recreate mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, that's neat. This neat to hear the history.
- Bob: Yeah.
- dindria: I love it. Um, alright. Uh, any other stories that you wanna tell, please? Just, just bring them out. Go ahead.
- Bob: Well, can I cite one that I think is really, probably most notable to me and dear to me, because I'm yet in contact, but this individual, we got many of the youth in Salishan

involved in what they call youth government. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. They had a, used to have an annual mock government in Olympia exposing young people to politics and, the governance. I remember this one young lady, Joyce Barr, and I think she was a student at Lincoln High School at that time. We took her down to Olympia. She got so involved in that. And then after a while after graduating from high school, I, I know she was a student, she was a graduate at PLU. And then we lost contact for years. Yeah. Up until maybe about 12, 12 to 15 years ago, I received a call from Mountain View Funeral Home, and they say, Reverend Penton, the caller said, Reverend Penton, there's someone who wants to talk to you who knows you.

Bob: So this person got on the phone. It was Joyce asking me to officiate the, the, uh, funeral for her mother, whom I knew very well. That was our house, that we did a lot of political planning in Salishan. But anyway, Joyce was reluctant to tell me all of what she had been doing all those years, but doing, after somewhere, days after the funeral, we did have lunch and little that I knew at that time, she had, uh, not only graduated from, uh, PLU, but also from Harvard. And she became a, an ambassador of several countries. She was appointed first by President Bush, you know, and then later by, uh, I think it was, uh, president, uh, Obama. Oh, right. You know, so she has served as an ambassador for several different countries. And she also served as the, uh, Deputy, um, Administrative Secretary, uh, uh, maybe Deputy Administrator for the, uh, State Department. Okay. Under Hillary R. Clinton. <Oh my goodness.> And our Secretary Clinton. And, uh, she was only let go, like many of them after our last, you know, under the last reign of the last president, actually. Right. <laugh>. But she's currently the on the board of Regents at PLU. She's also a professor at Virginia Tech. You know, now she is that unsung hero, you know, that I think would do good for an interview.

dindria: Oh, right. I like that. Yeah. Okay. I'm putting down Joyce Barr.

Bob: Yeah. You can Google her and much will happen.

dindria: <laugh>. Excellent. And I'll tell her that you sent me.

Bob: You bet, <laugh>. Absolutely. Absolutely.

dindria: Um, you have had an influence on other people's lives.

Bob: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

dindria: Mr. Penton. And, um, I think that that is just a testament when, when someone calls you after going through one of your programs and calls you many years later. Yes. That's because you're their mentor, you know? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you're their, um, role model. Yes. And, um, that's just a beautiful story. Thank you for sharing that.

Bob: Well, you know, there's so many, as you stated, there's so many stories I can recall from Salishan. Actually, I started one of the, if not one of the first, but the first outpatient youth substance abuse program. <Oh, wow.> On 44th and Portland Avenue. It was

called the Alpha House. <Oh, right.> And it was a start, "alpha" means in the beginning, you know, you know, and for many young people it was, but I remember, and I think I shared with you earlier, that it was only one supermarket in that community, but I would never forget this one. A young man, youth that was referred to us from Raymond Hall. And this person had been involved in shoplifting at Piggly Wiggly. I didn't want to name the store, but it was Piggly Wiggly, they called it. <Yes.> <laugh>. And, uh, but he was, you know, was referred as a diversionary program from Raymond Hall into Alpha House. Okay. I remember doing a group with this young man, and, um, this young man did not see himself as shoplifting, you know, I was wondering why he couldn't say that. And then he told me of, uh, gave me a testimony of what he had heard from his mother. He had wanted a, a special pair of sneakers, and the mother said, I can't afford it. And she used the word to him, uh, because I'm being ripped off at Piggly Wiggly.

dindria: <laugh>. Oh, goodness.

Bob: So this child thought he was taking back what had been stolen from him. <Right.> And that was, I mean, I, it was really amazing how, you know, he, he was able to really understand that.

dindria: Yes.

Bob: That's been his reason. You know, he heard what his mother had stated, used that expression of being ripped off. So mm-hmm. <affirmative> mom, I'll go and take back <laugh>.

dindria: Well he, he was fighting for justice.

Bob: Absolutely, yes. Absolutely.

dindria: So when he came through Alpha House, was it a more about giving him the resources <Yes.> To go to the next part of his life?

Bob: Absolutely.

dindria: Put that Piggly Wiggly thing up behind him <laugh> mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Bob: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, because we, along with, uh, in our, one of the, um, modalities, if you will, of, of our program was to involve the whole family, you know, and we had a garden project right there adjacent to we, we had five acres over there. And on those acreage, we had garden plots where the families would be involved as well, you know, working with their child. So we assign a plot to a family to cultivate it and do whatever. So, but it was amazing just the interaction with mom and son or daughter. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, it really began to really, you know, break some of the barriers and, and they found themselves communicating. But I never forget this one child who, um, after tilling the land and doing all the good stuff, you know, and then putting back in

the soil what was missing, and this, they planted the seed, and then this child disappeared.

Bob: I mean, I didn't see him until later in the season, came back looking for whatever he had <laugh> produce he was expecting. But that was, I was able to really say, Hey, you only planted to seed, but you didn't come back to really nurture. You have to nurture it, your crop. So we talked about it in group, and we related that in terms of how you build your life from a foundation. The very first thing you got to really take [00:27:00] out what may be missing and add what needs to be added. Right. In order to really, so that was, we was able to really, you know, make that point with many of the children that we served at that time.

dindria: Oh, those were life lessons. Yeah. I, I'll tell you what, it reminds me a lot of the different programs that the Black Panthers were running.

dindria: Yes. And I know that they, we have a chapter in Seattle mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I'm not sure if we have a chapter in Tacoma. I don't think we do. But, um, no, no. I, I know that, um, many of the programs had to do with reteaching life skills that somehow got past.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: Yes. And, and learning how to have that tenacity in your life to complete something, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, alright. Uh, the next question is, who are you and where do you come from? And you can take that any way you wanna take it. It doesn't have to be literal, it can be metaphorical, philosophical <laugh>.

Bob: Well, you know, I think the way I would like to answer that question is to talk about my, my quote for my, my life quote is, this, poverty of purpose is worse than poverty of purse. Most people see it in reverse. I just need another dollar. Right? <laugh>, and you remember the book, I think, uh, Rick Warren came up with a Purpose Driven Life? <I have heard of that.> Yes. Many people including myself at that time, had bought the book. He was doing seminars all over the place. Many of the churches in the community, in this community, you know, on a certain night you could look on their billboards: And this is a night we gonna talk about purpose driven life. They had the books. I had cases of them myself, <laugh>. I soon realized that is not a purpose driven, but a purpose given.

dindria: Ooh.

Bob: You know, because many, what I'm saying is that, and I'm a minister, so I certainly believe in the holy scripture that says, in in the book of, uh, Jeremiah 29 said, I know my thoughts for you. I know my purpose. I have for you for good and not for evil. Right. You know, I knew you before you was even in your mother's womb, Robert <laugh>. So I gave you purpose. All right. You know, and it's for you to discover that what is already there. So that's what I challenge people with, you know, and who I am is that, you know,

a person who understand clearly his purpose and, uh, who tries and helps others discover that.

dindria: All right. See, I was just gonna ask, so what is Robert's purpose?

Bob: Yeah, yeah. Well, really centered mostly around young people, young men. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, especially black males. You know, I think I indicated just the other two weeks ago I was at, uh, PLU because I was invited to a breakfast there, uh, to, uh, begin to really kind of impart, you know, elderly wisdom to those young black students. Yes. And, uh, I was really, really blessed to see how they gobble it up. <laugh>. They was very hungry for knowledge, you know? And, uh, and I begin to develop a relationship out of that. And I, you know, I, I call them the ones that I was directly, um, you know, in communication with. So that's kind of my job. And I think the other thing is, is to be able to not throw the torch, but firmly place the torch in their hand. You know? And I think that's what I think we miss out sometimes, you know, is we don't firmly place that torch.

Bob: We may throw it, but we need to put it there, place it carefully in their hand. And, uh, even if that torch seemed to flicker or go out a little bit, we need to fan the flames to keep it burning. So that's what I do. You know, I, I write, you know, I did some writing, you know, um, and I think it was 2019, I did Op/Ed writing for the TNT and, um, just try to highlight people that I knew that were unrepresented, you know, and tell that story. So that's what I do on a daily basis now for, uh, Facebook. That's my calling. Right. And I'd like to say this, you know, people think of being a, a minister or a pastor, you know, as having it behind a lecture or a pulpit. Right. With a minister's people, or some people, you know, listening. That's not my role. I've done that. <laugh> Yes. I've been a senior pastor, you know, in many, many places. But I think, you know, when people ask me, where's your church? And they always do. And I let them know. I say, you know, the church is not a place you attend, but the people you are, you know, and my church doesn't have any walls, you know?

dindria: Wow. I just, I wanna do this and I wanna clap, and I want to yell. <laugh>, I'm gonna keep myself contained. Okay. <laugh> good. Because I went to, but I, I just, everything you're saying really resonates with me. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And I really love the idea that, um, it is with the people that you are with.

Bob: Yes. Our pilot. Yes.

dindria: I love that. You know, speaking of TNT, we inherited all of the TNT archives.

Bob: Oh.

dindria: And so we've got file cabinets...

Bob: <laugh>. Oh my goodness. <I know.> Really?

dindria: And I'm gonna give you some blast from the past pictures.

Bob: Oh, boy. Is that, who is that?

dindria: Yeah. Who is that? <laugh>.

Bob: Oh, okay. Yeah. I was senior pastor at that time, uh, at the, um, it was a church called The, um, Family Life Formation located out of First Baptist Ninth and Market Street here in Tacoma. And this may have been from an interview, I don't know this was one that time, but I have, during the outset of some of our gangs, or the infiltration of a lot of the mm-hmm. <affirmative> gang members coming from the south, you know, to here from LA and other places, I noticed that the community was just inundated with, uh, with fear. <Yes.> You know, living behind closed doors. I mean, drive-bys was a frequent thing up on the Hilltop, especially. And one day, you know, I decided, you know, we need to change that. We need to, somebody need to demonstrate that we don't have to live in fear. So I fasted on top of the roof of a local church on the Hilltop for about 10 days. And it drew a lot of attention, you know? And, um, and it was a lot of stories that went with that almost daily. I can hear on the nightly, I can hear the gunshots over, almost over my head, on top of the roof of that church on, uh, I think it was New Jerusalem Church there in the, in the Hilltop. So this may have been from that article.

dindria: It is from that time because, um, they gave kind of like an overview of you.

Bob: Okay.

dindria: They talked about the fasting.

Bob: Okay. Now this one, and I see just briefly, I see the Puyallup Nazarene Church, because this was a second fast, as opposed to being on top of the roof. I sent out 20, uh, requests from different churches, different, uh, denominations or whatever. And I received 10 saying Yes. The request was that, can I come and spend one night at the altar of your church? Wow. And, um, I'm not, you're not required to be there, pastor, but I just want to do that. So I took a, a bottle of distilled water to the altar. So I arrive around six, I leave at six the next day, morning. And, um, it went, took me from Hilltop churches to University Place churches. And the last one, believe it or not, was the Nazarene Church in Puyallup.

dindria: Wow.

Bob: And I see it here.

dindria: That is neat.

Bob: Yeah.

dindria: So you got a lot of people involved in the awareness of this issue.

Bob: Yeah, yeah.

dindria: Of, of breaking down the barriers of fear.

Bob: Yes, yes. <Yes.> And I remember, I remember, um, the newspaper, I think it was, uh, Steve Mayer, who was the religious columnist for the TNT at that time, had wrote an article, and they had noticed that during that 10 day fast and on the roof, that the crime had really went down. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> a notch or two. Yeah. You know, so not only because of my prayers in fashion, but there was many people, you know, I had a close friend, he's deceased now, was David Weyerhaeuser. And Dave, he wanted me to prefer call him Dave as opposed to, you know, uh, Mr. Weyerhaeuser or whatever. But he would always honk leaving the, uh, financial center downtown Tacoma mm-hmm. <affirmative> to where he lived out, you know, in UP place. He would always honk when he passed by <laugh>. And I would, you know, salute a wave, um, up in a tent on top of the roof, on, on the 11th, I think street.

dindria: I see that, that yeah, gets awareness as well.

Bob: And then it had a whole big rally afterwards. People came as far as, uh, Maryville. Yeah. <Wow.> Yeah.

dindria: And so it was a celebration?

Bob: It was a celebration. Yeah.

dindria: How did you make it through, this may be a silly question mm-hmm. <affirmative>, but I try not to say that there are such things, but how did you make it through the fast?

Bob: Well, I was advised not to by medical people, my friend, first they warned me <laugh>. I don't think you can, you shouldn't do that. Uh, you can't last. But I went without water for 10 days as well as food. Okay. And you can, and I think the difference, because I see a, I hear a lot of hunger strikes, you know, and I've seen, I've known people to fast that long. You know, Gandhi did. Right. Dr. King did <laugh>. Right. But this one, I mean, I was really slow in moving first because I felt that it was ordained by God. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, I heard a voice saying, do it. But I also remember some of the principles I understood about fasting in the Bible. You don't get on the roof to do it, <laugh>, that's too public. But what I was doing, you know, was just that is to demonstrate, you know, again, you know, trying to help people understand we don't have to live with fear. Right. You know? So that was important to me. And, um, but it received a lot of coverage from, from all, from all the way from, you know, I mean, all, every newspaper. I remember reporters coming from the, uh, uh, Seattle Times and spending some time. I remember KIRO, I think it was KIRO or, um, KOMO, one of them. But they spent a considerable amount of time interviewing and trying to understand what this was about, you know, but it, it served its purpose.

dindria: All right. Thank you so much for sharing that piece of history. I think that your story is very inspirational. Um, I think that I would give you credit for making that change for

Hilltop mm-hmm. <affirmative>, because, you know, I know there were a lot of people involved in making it.

Bob: Yes, very much so. Yeah.

dindria: I live, um, Hilltop adjacent. Okay. I thought I lived on Hilltop, but then somebody told me where the line was, and I was like...

Bob: Yeah, there's a line <laugh> <laugh>. Right.

dindria: It's very serious about like where the lines are.

dindria: Yes. Um, and, um, but I know that in my neighborhood, there are blockades still mm-hmm. <affirmative> to stop the drive-bys, right? Yes. And like the dead end street all of a sudden or something like that mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, um, I feel safe in my neighborhood, and I feel safe walking through Hilltop. Yes. And it's because of the things that you did. Yeah.

Bob: And, and people and many others Yeah.

dindria: In that, in that time. That's great.

Bob: Thank you for sharing that. That's excellent.

dindria: I really enjoy, and I really enjoy the fact that I'm in a neighborhood where there are all kinds of people mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, we've got, um, a Native American family. We've got a white family, we've got my mixed family. <Yes.> And we have black family down the road. And it's just, it's really interesting to me how Tacoma has changed, even though there was the redlining.

Bob: Yes. <You know?> Yes.

dindria: Um, and how the neighborhood is still moving strong.

Bob: Yes. You know, you know, and really that speaks volumes, you know, to, to just the good stuff. I know about Tacoma, unlike many other cities I've worked or live, Tacoma has such a network, more of a collaborative spirit than many of the other cities. Hmm. You know, and, uh, I think our leaders in Tacoma tend, tend to be even political leaders, our mayor, city manager, much more accessible than some of the other bureaucracies that I've, I'm familiar with. And I think that that's what really makes Tacoma to be such a, the City of Destiny, <laugh>, you know, is because of that, you know, and many people who are now sharing that leadership, you know, started out in the trenches, you know, so, uh, and that certainly makes a difference. Yeah. You know, I have a, um, I recently did a class at, uh, Clover Park to, uh, students who are majoring in sociology. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, uh, I talk about the seven principles of engaging of how to engage in the community.

- dindria: Oh. You know, so you gonna share those with us right now? Or do I have to come to a class?
- Bob: What do I have to, well, I do have a copy of what I shared <laugh>, but, uh, but that's, you know, it's, it's really, you know, the first thing I, I think I remember sharing with them is to really begin to really adopt a need to, um, to learn, you know, to be taught rather than coming to teach. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, how so many do. And I, what I try and, and say is that how to afford shooting your own self in, in, in the foot, you know, and pin in your ear close to the ground, you know, do what I did. Go to the barbershop <laugh> and learn. That's right. You know, be more inclined to listen than to speak, you know, and speak to those leaders, speak to that mom who, you know, is barely making ends meet. But she need to be honored. You know, she's a great economist, <laugh>, you know?
- Bob: Yes. Cause she's making, she can balance her budget every day <laugh>. We can't do that as a nation. But, um, true. It's those type of, you know, just really understand taking a, you know, I, and because many young people, and I've seen many, you know, come with the ideas that we come in to rescue you or save you. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we come in to bring this, all these wonderful gifts or whatever. And then they, you know, after months of that kind of attitude, they got no takers. No one is interested, because, you know, people don't want to know how much you know, unless they know how much you care and to be able to walk with them. Yes. You know, and I let 'em know that you'll never, you can never go wrong if you do that, you know, because I believe, you know, it's almost like the concept of, of sailing, you know, whether you know the art of sailing?
- dindria: Yeah. Cost and demand?
- Bob: Or, yeah. Well, in a sailboat. No, I mean, oh, sailing not selling. Yes. Oh, okay. That's my southern. Oh, I got you. No worries. But, but one of the arts I've discovered is what they call tacking.
- dindria: Okay.
- Bob: And it's cross winds, you know, it's some, an example, like if you are, you know, on course for the, uh, lighthouse, okay? Of the buoy, you know, it looks like you're going this way, but you stay the course, you're not, you still on course, even though it may look as if you veered. And that's what I tell young people, you know, sometime you have to, you know, just listen, you know, and, uh, let people invite you in, you know, to you sharing your knowledge about what you want to do.
- dindria: So, you have such wisdom to share, and I hope that you continue to keep running classes and, and meeting up with people that need to hear what you have to say, because I'm learning from you as well. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, right now, and it reminds me of when I was a young teacher mm-hmm. <affirmative>, and I was what I

would call a chili pepper. Yes. So I was just like spicy and ready to go. Yes. You know, and, um, always

Bob: <laugh>

dindria: Always running into walls. Yes. You know, as well. And thinking that I'm, I'm gonna knock 'em down mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>, they didn't knock down very well.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: And so I had to learn without any mentors or elders that it was about that energy being put out where I was like, trying to force things. Yes. Instead of learning from things first Yes. And then figuring out how to sail.

Bob: Yes. Right? Yes.

dindria: Okay. So I think I'm, I think I'm understanding the metaphor. Yeah. Um, and it just, it's, it's something that I think might take time mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, because like Maya Angelou says she loves the youth because they're impatient.

Bob: Yes. <laugh>.

dindria: <laugh>. And I love them that way. Well,

Bob: Yes. Yes.

dindria: You need to have the skills to go with that mm-hmm. <affirmative> energy.

Bob: Mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>, yes. Mm-hmm.

dindria: <affirmative>. So, I mean, I'm just, that's great. I'm glad you're out there teaching the young folks what kind of sailing tacking skills they need to have mm-hmm, <affirmative> to go with that energy.

Bob: Yeah. Yeah. You know, and, and also I believe in those transferable skills. Yes. You know, that negative stuff that you was involved in, how can we, I mean, that's what, that's what the Bible is all about, that's what the stories in, in the New Testament, you know, and I gleaned from one, I remember once Jesus was on his way with his two disciples, at least James and John, and he needed a place to board for the night, you know? And, uh, he went to this inn and they refused him. Right. This is not the little baby. This is a man Jesus. Yes. Yes. And the two disciples looked at Jesus and say, just give us a word, because we can call thunder and lightning down. Okay. And Jesus said, put it away. He actually rebuked them. And what I gleaned from that mm-hmm. <affirmative>...

Bob: Then he said, you sons of thunder, he realized in their character was just that, you know, and we can use that. Right. But not now. All right. You know, let's, let's walk together a little longer. You know, there will be a time that you might have to call the thunder down, but not now, you know? Yes. So, how can we transfer without spoiling the, the individual, how can we transfer those skills for something, for the good of the whole, you know? And the same way that the disciples with Peter, with the Fishman, I'll now not take away your skills of efficient, but I'll just point you to fishermen of men. Yes. As opposed to feeding yourself, you know?

dindria: Oh my goodness.

Bob: So those kinds of concepts is what I, I live on. Yes. Yeah. I have seven children.

dindria: All right. Yeah. So you came from a family of...

Bob: Seven, a family of seven and seven. Yeah.

dindria: All right. Yeah. Tell us about them.

Bob: Well, they all are doing well. Uh, I have one son, my oldest child and son, his name is Bobby. And, um, Bobby, after a while he graduated from Curtis and then he got involved, well, it was a long while before he got involved in drugs, but he used to go around the country. He and his friend, something I never understood, but they was talking about a concept about Facebook long before Facebook. Oh my goodness. And they were showing me all this stuff that I didn't even know anything about. I couldn't even turn on my phone. <laugh>. Right. <laugh>. But anyway, that was him. But later he was involved in a very serious accident, car accident mm-hmm. Accident that he spent months at Harborview [hospital]. He was taking his brother, his younger brother, Ethan, back to Central [Washington University], and fell asleep on I90 and ended up in a, you know, well, he was returning, his brother was out or had, had dropped him off at college, but he had, he was return, he fell asleep and, uh, ended up with some severe injury.

Bob: You know, his femoral [artery], when I arrived there, um, his head was had, he had intracranial pressure. But anyway, he walked away from treatment afterwards. Cause, and he had never been the same. I mean, he, he tends to function good, but he ended up doing drugs. He's special. And we lost contact with him for a long time. He left for California, came back. There were people who had sightings of seeing him in Seattle, but for three years, we didn't even know where he was at. And, um, always go to this feeling of when I have this inclination. Anyway, one morning, this was three years, not knowing what Bobby, but one morning I woke up with this, this inkling, if you will, saying, go and see your son. Yes. So I woke my wife up this Saturday morning, six o'clock <laugh>. She was sick that day. She, and she was reluctant, I'll go with you, she said, see your son.

Bob: You know, my ex, my, my, um, this is, you know, my current wife. She said, see your son. She said, are we going to look for your son? I said, no, I'm going to see him. I was pretty

bold at that time. I received a call from California, now, his son. Okay. Yeah. My grandson. Yes. It was a doctor saying he had just been in a very serious accident, and he may not survive. And they wanted me to give them permission to pull the plug. Oh my goodness. And I said, no. Right. I said, because he's not your son. He's my son, my grandson. So we got off the phone, we proceeded to Seattle, me and my wife mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I was driving a Ford 1-50 coming through Fife. And all of a sudden I remember saying to this voice, right. If I said the right thing to that doctor, that he will, my grandson would not die. I want you to really validate that, confirm it. So soon as I get to Seattle, I went to see his son, my, my grandson's father or my son. Right. Bobby.

dindria: Right.

Bob: We got to, uh, about, uh, 1st Avenue, 1st and Spring, somewhere around there. And my son Bobby, jumped, we stopped at a light, he jumped in the vehicle! <jump>

Bob: And my wife almost did, just like you just did. Yeah. Couldn't believe it. <laugh>. But I said, how did you know? He said, I heard a voice. Said, come right here. He said, dad, I never frequent this area, but I heard this. And he jumped in the back and we had started redeveloping our connection. And then I probably wrote about the, you read in the TNT where I slept on the sidewalk of Seattle with him, you know, because I wanted to really learn and understand. But I slept on that sidewalk. Oh goodness. One night with him. And I developed a host of wonderful relationship with other homeless young men who actually saved his life, later on. Right.

dindria: Right. What a story, um, that just has me thinking about how we don't fully understand our world and our universe and our faith.

Bob: Mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

dindria: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, and that it, it has that magical appeal.

Bob: Yes. You know? Yes.

dindria: Where it's just, it's mysterious, it's unknown, but it is knowable. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, <laugh>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Right on. Um, okay.

Bob: But I, I like to share it. Uh, yes. Without, I, I think it's, it's, it's really incumbent upon us of people who carry that kind of truth is, is how you, how you report it, how you dispense it, you know, I mean, it's nothing, it's not, although it's mysterious. Okay. But it's, it's, it's being present every day. I mean, I, I, I get so excited every day. You know, I sit on my back porch to my, my, my, uh, my deck on my back. And I, okay. And I, I, I see nature, you know, I see the little hummingbirds. I see holy, the flowers. I love sitting back there. I get my greatest inspiration just sitting, watching that to me, you know, I mean, that, that is, that's faith in action. I learned so much from, from those little creatures that annoy us like ants <laugh>. Yeah. You know, I wouldn't dare destroy their little bunk they make because of the energy and the tenacity that goes into that. Yeah. To build

that mound, you know, in my backyard. So why would I? You know, there's extremely frugal. They store up in the winter, I mean, in summer for winter. Right. I don't even do that. <laugh>.

Bob: It's authentic. They're doing that at a whole 'nother level.

dindria: Yeah.

Bob: Yeah. <laugh>, you know, so I guess I'm, what I'm saying is that, it's beyond what I was taught growing up about, you know, the church and faith and all of this. I understand that it's so, so far different. You know, it's not a religious thing. It's not a thing that, you know, that people should subscribe to, you know, for the purpose of pushing up, you know, some individual, you know. But we all are in this together. And I think just living it out and being content, you know, and speaking out where you can certainly, but it's, it's certainly different than, it's not that big sketchy bear <laugh>, you know, <laugh> big monster that, you know, I mean, it's, it's obtainable. You can reach it. It is, it happens every day. Every day. I see it. You know?

dindria: So, I love how you describe being present. Um, I know that bell hooks encouraged me to stay centered.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: And I, I try, I don't know, I try every day, mm-hmm. <affirmative> to be centered and then to have that presence.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: But what you're describing to me is this connection with the world and the universe.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: That can bring you happiness. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and contentedness. And I'm, I'm getting shivers. <laugh>.

Bob: Well, you know, you know, but one of the steps of that is to abandon your own thoughts.

dindria: Ah,

Bob: Be willing to abandon yourself. Yes. You know, and that's what I do. Every morning I get up about five, between 4:30 and five o'clock. I have a whole list of things I want to say or do <laugh> and, you know, and, and, and put before all of that. But I try and abandon, I try to un-attach myself to all of that. You know, things that I think that are noble. Even like this interview, I mean, I scheduled it to come, but if, if, you know, if I want it to be spontaneous, yes. You know, my life, I have to live that way. Yeah. I have agendas and

all of that, but to abandon that and much, usually when I have that mindset, it comes back. Okay. But if I'm willing to let go for the present. Right. Not for something I've wrote <laugh> months or years ago, <laugh>.

Bob: But it may be something different that I need to see today. Alright. I can tell the same story today and tell it even deeper with more intensity tomorrow. That same story with more of a fresh approach or expressions of it. So be willing to abandon when you abandon. Yeah. And that's what I, I do marriage counseling, a pre-marital counseling. I do a lot of weddings. I got one marriage coming up. Right. <laugh>, and I tell all the, one, I do a lot of pre-marital counseling first, and one of the first principles I must let them know is you gotta be willing to lose their desire to have the last word. I use, if you see my post today, I talked about, you know, um, don't be a die hard. And all the baby boomers were, remember this when we're about to say, because it was an ad and it was the American Tobacco Company advertising Tareyton cigarettes. Okay. <laugh>, you remember that? <laugh> <No.> <laugh>. Oh. It was the most classic ad of that era back in the sixties. And it had the black eye of two women smoking a cig, a Tareyton cigarette. And the, the, the quote underneath that, I would rather fight than switch.

dindria: <laugh> So be careful.

Bob: Careful of black eyes.

dindria: <laugh> Yes.

Bob: Rather fight than switch.

dindria: <laugh>

Bob: And I talk about, I say we have long past that type of commercialism with tobacco. I see. But that thought process is the same in terms of there are people who would rather fight to maintain a unhealthy relationship than to take flight, moving themselves out of it.

dindria: Yes. You know, I'm glad you're doing that as well, because a lot of people need to hear it. Yeah. <laugh>, um, the last question mm-hmm. <affirmative> that I have for you is, I'm, I'm gonna take apart the first part and I'm gonna gonna say, what are your dreams?

Bob: Wow.

Bob: I think my dream is to again, is to make sure that I pass the, the torch, the candle, carefully place it in the hands, particularly our young people, you know, and to certainly listen to their stories, but, but allow to create that involvement where they would hunger for my story. Right. You know, so that is, that's, that's my mission, you know, is to do that and, and to help be a cheerleader, you know, in their lives. And, um, develop relationships, teach them how to develop, and I say influential relationships, and I don't mean just with money, but I mean with influence other ways of being in, you know,

having a person who brings certain kinds of skills and talents and surround themselves around you. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, to help with your vision, you know? And that's what I've been able to do all my life. You know, I've often said that I'm one of the wealthiest people, not if you look at my bank account--you'll run, that's not it.

dindria: <laugh>.

Bob: But in terms of people I love, I cherish relationships, you know, not just for myself, but to help, you know, to, to, to be able to draw from, you know, in helping other people, you know? Right. Those different gatekeepers, may they be political, may they be bankers or legal politicians or whatever. It's develop relationships.

dindria: That's your currency.

Bob: That's my currency. Yes. I like that. Yes.

dindria: Um, I know that another elder told me, be very specific about who you put in your inner circle.

Bob: Yes.

dindria: Be almost strategic with it. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and make sure that you have a reciprocal relationship, Mm-hmm, <affirmative> not just one way.

Bob: Yes. Yes.

dindria: That you feed each other.

Bob: That is so profoundly true. Absolutely. I believe that. Yeah. Yeah. It, it has to be a level playing field, you know, and, um, even people who have given me from their foundation, like David Weyerhaeuser, you know, when he was doing his Stewardship Foundation, he had, you know, and we used to meet every other Tuesday for breakfast mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, and I remember the very first meeting is that I don't want you to see me as your project <laugh>. And I often wondered about that. You know, why we call public housing projects. Projects is something that you kinda work on, you know, <laugh>. Right, right. This project, it's supposed to progress some kind of way. Yeah. Yeah. So I think you asked me, you know, my dreams again, more specifically is directed to young people and how I can help build them up. You know, there was a story and can I share this? <Yes.>

Bob: That I learned so well from in South Central, you remember, it was before the riots. You know, I think the riots in Watts was about 2000. I mean, uh, uh, '66, '65, 1965. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But it left a lot of abandoned lots and buildings. Yeah. Just miles on Central Avenue, you know, that were buildings that once stood at grocery stores or other kinds of endeavors. Now they was burnt out. Yeah. And they, that lot was inundated with debris or, or, you know, grass or whatever. But I never forget this one

mother that lived across the street from one of those lots. And she had a daughter. And, uh, she was very strategic, you know, in terms of allowing her daughter to, you know, where she can frequent. But one day, this nine-year-old, she had asked her mother, can she go out and play or go out, you know, to visit?

Bob: And the only place that was available was across the street into this lot where there was edges of the lot. There was pretty clean, but deeper in it was a lot of stuff. So, but this mother, you know, told her daughter, yes, you can only with one stipulation be back before dark. And I remember long after that time, six o'clock had expired. There was no daughter. And, uh, I remember this mother coming out on the edge of her steps, just yelling in a, in a state of hysteria. You know, she was just really bewildered or distraught. And pretty soon the lights began to flicker in the community and people came out. Yes. You know, and still they didn't know what was going on, but they knew that the daughter was not right next to her mother. So it was pertaining to the daughter. All this array of people came around, these mothers from the community of different diversity. I mean, it was a diverse group. And pretty soon the silence broke. And, um, one person said, what if we would join hands and make a human chain? And we would go all over this field, this lot, and we would, you know, walk step by step until we find your daughter. And that was great.

Bob: So as they had this human chain, they combed that whole field and they found, you know, the daughter on the last step. But she was in a hole and she was dead. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, she had fell into the crevice. And again, it was silence. What do you say now? And someone broke the silence again and said, what if we would've joined hands earlier and done it sooner, then maybe this girl will yet be alive? My lesson from that, there are many young people who have fallen through the crevices of our city, of our community. And it's not too late for all of us to comb the streets and find them.

dindria: That's a beautiful story. And it's, it's sad and tragic, but it teaches a lesson.

Bob: Yeah, yeah.

dindria: About urgency.

Bob: Urgency, absolutely.

dindria: And community. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, having that solidarity to want to do for our kids.

Bob: Yeah. Together. And it's amazing that, you know, it usually takes something bigger than ourselves. I remember when I, one of the worst times in Louisiana, as an example, was the Hurricane Betsy. Mm-hmm. It was worse than some of the ones we see. I remember that [Hurricane] Katrina. <Yeah.> In track. Well, maybe not. Yeah. With, with the flooding. But it was extremely bad during that time, and it was pre-civil rights again. Mm-hmm. So we was all in separate schools, but when the prognosticators and the governor spoke saying, go to the nearest place for evacuation, well, the nearest place

where I lived was a white school. And I walked in the gym, my, our whole family with people who didn't look like us on the floor.

dindria: Right.

Bob: You know, with cover. <Yeah.> And I said something different. I said, did anybody change something in Baton Rouge in the capitol to make this happen? Right. But what I learned, it takes something bigger than all of us to break down those walls, to bring that common purpose. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, sometimes tragedy that we've seen just the other day in Texas. Yeah. You know, we are seeing some walls begin to crumble out of that in terms of new legislation about gun control. Right. So sometimes it takes something greater than ourselves. Yeah. That we can see ourselves with each other. Mm-hmm.

dindria: <affirmative>, it gives us a better mirror to reflect.

Bob: Yeah.

dindria: And what path we should take. Right. <Yeah.> We're gonna sail.

Bob: Absolutely. We're, yes. Yes.

dindria: Um, and I'm sorry that I look off to the distance. No. Okay. It's because I'm, I'm, I'm trying to hold on to everything that you shared and I just wanna thank you so much Mm. For sharing your story, your insights, your wisdom mm-hmm. <affirmative> and, and sharing it with everyone who is going to access it. Mm. On this database. Thank you. So, um, I appreciate you and um, yeah.

Bob: Well, thank you for inviting me. Thank you. Yes.

dindria: It's been a pleasure, <laugh>.

Bob: Well, it is my honor. I appreciate it.