

# Real CHANGE

Puget Sound's  
Newspaper of the Poor  
and Homeless

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## Boomtown Cafe

### Double portions of dignity in Pioneer Square

BY PETER BLOCH-GARCIA

The paint on the walls is still fresh, the colors bright shades of orange. The tables and chairs are still stacked on top of each other. A short, partitioned section designates what will soon be a play area for children. It may sound like a work-in-progress, but the Boomtown Cafe, which opens later this month, will soon serve as one of the most innovative and original dining establishments in Seattle.

Why is the Boomtown Cafe so unique?

Well, for starters, in Seattle's competitive climate of fine dining establishments, Boomtown Cafe will operate entirely as a non-profit restaurant serving the low-income and homeless. More than a soup kitchen of sorts, the cafe promises some very unique features. "The goal has always been to provide a meal that is hot, nutritious, and served in a respectful manner, in a dignified atmosphere so people can feel appreciated," says Anthony Anderson, Boomtown Cafe's Executive Director. Breakfast — which includes a short menu of omelettes, French toast, hashbrowns, and pancakes — is priced at \$1.25; lunch — which includes a short menu of soup, salad, and sandwiches — is priced at \$1.75. The cafe will serve food from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Boomtown Cafe was the brainchild of members of Operation Homestead. It initially provided meal service to various shelters in Seattle, including Angeline's day center, Hammond House, Wintonia Hotel, and the Women's Referral Center. Michael Campbell, a board member at the Boomtown Cafe, sees the restaurant filling a need in the community. "Our original goal was to create a space for people, no matter what their place in society, where he or she could be served a meal," says Campbell. "We saw the dignity of people who were served food instead of waiting in line."

Anderson wants the atmosphere to be inviting and family-friendly. He also eyed the cafe's downtown location in order to better serve people. Individuals from different shelters can easily access the cafe via Metro's ride-free zone. Also, the cafe will serve all people, and is not limited to individuals facing tough economic times. He promises the cafe will provide good food and good service, and hopes to attract many of the working professionals in the neighborhood — especially employees at the nearby courthouse, police department, and city hall.

Eventually, Anderson would like to see the cafe expand, serving all people in the South downtown community in addition to providing catering and boxed lunches. Making its meals accessible to a wider range of people with different income levels is a first in the city. Boomtown Cafe is prepared to accept different forms of payment for service, including cash, food stamps, or credit accrued while working at the cafe.

Another important component of the Boomtown Cafe is its vocational aspect. The restaurant will assist people who have been out of work to re-en-

ter the work force and establish job skills and references.

The opening of the cafe has been delayed a number of times. After recently acquiring financial support through grants from the City of Seattle and Boeing, Anderson says the Boomtown Cafe will officially open its doors to the public this month. The cafe has also received donations and support from Associated Grocers, Immunex, and Microsoft. Also, Anderson hopes to find

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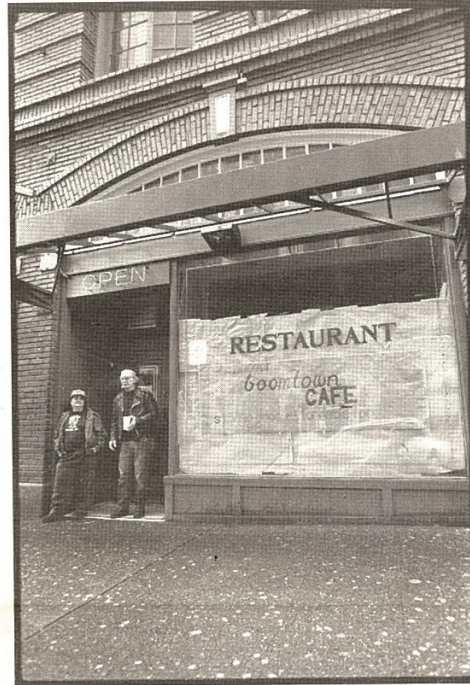


PHOTO BY CHRIS CUMMINGS

## Father Bill

### Priest Bill Bichsel puts his body and soul on the line

INTERVIEW BY TODD MATTHEWS

In March 1998 *Real Change* met with priest and social justice advocate Bill Bichsel on the eve of his felony trial for protesting at the School of the Americas (SOA) — a U.S. Army training school in Ft. Benning, GA, that trains soldiers and military personnel from Latin American countries in subjects like counter-insurgency, infantry tactics, military intelligence, anti-narcotics, and commando operations. Critics argue that SOA graduates have led military coups and are responsible for massacres of hundreds of people.

SOA graduates, according to critics, were responsible for the Uruba massacre in Colombia, the El Mozote massacre, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the Jesuit massacre in El Salvador, and hundreds of other human rights abuses. Shortly after last year's interview with *Real Change*, Bichsel was sentenced to a total of 18 months in prison. He was released in September 1998, and has returned to his native Tacoma, Washington.

Bichsel recently met with *Real Change*, during the height of the WTO ministerial and protests, and discussed his experiences actively protesting the SOA, life in a Federal Prison Camp, and his future plans for a spirituality center in Tacoma, Washington.

**"My lawyer asked me if I had any statement to make after my sentence. I said, 'What I did, I did as a matter of conscience, and I could not and would not do any differently than what I did.' I felt at peace then."**

**REAL CHANGE:** When you last met with *Real Change* for an interview, you were facing a prison sentence for actions connected to the campaign to close the School of the Americas. What happened since that time?

**BILL BICHSEL:** I had a jury trial, along with four others involved in the protest. We were represented by an attorney from Minneapolis and an attorney from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In January 1998, twenty-five people were tried for trespassing and received six-month sentences and \$3,000 fines. Myself and four others were then tried in July 1998 for helping people hang banners at the School of the Americas (SOA), painting "School of the Assassins" and "School of Torture"

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**BICHSEL, CONT. FROM PAGE 6**

**RC:** So what was your goal for going down there again? Probably not to get arrested again, right?

**BICHSEL:** No. I gave my probation officer the assurance that I would not get arrested. I was going down there just to be a part of it. For me it's a great time. It's a great spiritual experience just to be there. Especially for me to see people there crossing the line. They cross in a somewhat funeral-procession style, and they have a reader announce the names of people who have been massacred in El Salvador, Honduras. When the names are announced, everyone responds, "Presente!" It's kind of a low time. You can see the tears in people's eyes as they cross the line. I know it's a moving time for them. That always gets me. And to see the youth protesting is amazing.

When I first went down there in 1994, there were 20 of us — all with gray hair (laughing). We fasted and held a vigil. Five were arrested the first year. The next year there were 40 of us, and 10 were arrested. The next year there were 500 of us, and 60 were arrested. And the following year, 2,500, and 600 were arrested. I just feel that it's an experience for so many going there — an experience that touches lives in some way or another that they are not going to abandon that call for justice.

**RC:** Is it different than what we've seen at the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial, where there are hundreds of different organizations involved?

**BICHSEL:** It's mostly coordinated by "SOA Watch." Many people think that the protest at SOA is too controlled and there's not enough room for real imaginative resistance. It's kind of the same scenario. A controlled environment. That's different than the WTO protests, where organizations were able to express their individuality, and had lots of different ways to say no to WTO. The WTO gave opportunity for more creative expression. I think the thing for us at the SOA is that we do come out of a faith tradition. That is part of the power — the diversity of faith traditions coming together to say no to SOA.

**RC:** What is being done year-round to shut down the SOA?

**BICHSEL:** There is constant campaigning from different representatives. There is SOA West, SOA Southeast, SOA Northwest, SOA South, SOA Central, SOA East — it has kind of divided off into different regions and areas now. People are constantly urging their representatives and senators. There is a bill in the House of Representatives and a bill in the Senate to withdraw representation for the SOA. The one in the House is sponsored by a representative from Massachusetts, and the one in the Senate has a number of co-sponsors. The committee that has that bill in the House will not let it on the floor without 180 co-sponsors. Right now I think there are about 160 co-sponsors for that bill in the House. So they are working on getting another 20 co-sponsors.

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**RC:** How did you participate in the WTO protests here?

**BICHSEL:** Early in the morning, as they were trying to block delegates, I was there observing. And then I joined the march from Seattle Center with the AFL-CIO.

**RC:** Is it different participating in these events, having just come out of prison for protesting? Are you more on the front lines or less on the front lines?

**BICHSEL:** Well, I'm conscious of *not* being arrested, you know (laughing). I didn't realize how close I came, I guess. I didn't know we were in a civil disobedience group (laughing). We were just following the crowd and then all this stand-off started happening and at one point we were hit with tear gas.

**RC:** What are your plans, now that you are out of prison and back in Tacoma?

**BICHSEL:** One of the real luxuries I have coming out of prison is community. I have support. That is not true of most

people coming out of the joint. They don't have that. After doing their time, they have lost all they had. They can't return to jobs they had before. They lost their financial base. It's a brand new thing of where to go and how to go.

While I was in prison I was very interested in leading this scripture study in the gospel of Mark because it's very apparent that the following of Jesus is the following of resisting those powers that prevent people from living a human life. And so I was hoping that, in some way or another, much of this would take hold. People would use their experience of being in prison — of looking at the underbelly of the giant beast. Being able to use that in their later life could be a great voice for calling on the moratorium for putting people in prisons — the prison industry.

But when they come out, they have to follow the line of probation. They can't speak out. They are intimidated. They have to look to a livelihood. But in some way or another I was hoping they would have that sense to use their experience, band together, use their powerful voice to change that system.

**RC:** Do you feel that in having that conversation down there you were heard and people were feeling that?

**BICHSEL:** I think so. But I know that the powers are so tremendous once you get out. For some, they go back to where they came from. They go back to that culture. That's why you need support and community when you get out.

**RC:** What does that mean for you? Are you going to be directing more energy toward people coming out of prison? Do you sense a personal call in this?

**BICHSEL:** Not so much for myself. Maybe trying to empower others, or make others more aware. I am still tremendously interested in our community in Guadalupe

House. We're under threat because of the development that is happening from downtown Tacoma, near Pacific Avenue and Tacoma Avenue. Guadalupe House is right in that area. Low-income housing in that area is threatened by development. I would be interested in being able to resist that in some way. But I still see that as far as my own goals. I am very conscious of the prison issue, but I don't think I have the energy for it.

Something that looms larger to me at this point is a spirituality center near Guadalupe House. A place where people can come to be quiet, pray, and make retreat if they want. A place of sanctuary and prayer. All the forces of development around us — and Tacoma is so much of a military town — you need this sort of vibe of spirituality floating around there in the area. I feel a sort of calling to do something in that area. ☐



**BILL BICHSEL, LOOKING FOR TROUBLE AT TACOMA'S GUADALUPE HOUSE. PHOTO BY TODD MATTHEWS.**

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