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Interview with Tom Hastings

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Headnote	In this eloquent discussion, Dr. Hastings recounts his professional development as a scholar and practitioner of nonviolence. The first half of the story involves his youth, early activism, and college training in Wisconsin. The second half involves his move to Portland, Oregon in 2000 and his growing involvement with Conflict Resolution at PSU.

[Begin at 07:15]

PAS: I'm Patricia Schechter, today is Friday May 8th 2020, and we are in Portland, Oregon at Portland State University doing a virtual Zoom interview with Dr. Tom Hastings from the Conflict Resolution program. This interview is part of a history project that's getting underway this term in anticipation of the program's 25th anniversary. Thank you, Tom, for being here.

TH: Thank you.

PAS: Our class was really fired up about the amount of protest in the early 2000s, and the way that the world was mobilized after 9/11, primarily in opposition to the War in Iraq. That's around the time when you came to Portland. I'd love you to tell your story about landing in Portland at such a moment of mobilization against war.

TH: Yeah, I arrived late December of 2000. I had the winter to prepare for my teaching and I started teaching at PSU just part-time, just as an adjunct, in the spring of 2001. Of course, that was a period of time when the country was undergoing the aftermath of a hotly contested election; yet another election when the president was installed despite not winning the popular vote. This was George Bush the younger—a very fraught process that wound up being decided, in my opinion, amidst a lot of corruption in the state of Florida, and then by a 5-4 vote of the Supreme Court. To me that called for a do-over, but of course they did not do that.

It's kind of interesting because when I started at PSU I had no idea about what was going on other than I had the good fortune to move to the state and the city with the largest concentration of programs in my field in the United States of America except for Boston, Massachusetts. My field of conflict transformation, or peace studies, is a small field. In 1982, a friend of mine who was working for the Consortium of Peace Research Education and Development, which was our academic association, prepared a global list, a catalog, of all Peace and Conflict Studies Programs world-wide. It was two pages, two sides. [chuckles] So, we were a tiny little field in 1982. The latest directory is a very thick catalog of hundreds of programs around the world. We are a growth field and we are entering into sort of range of being a newer discipline by which I believe—and I'm not the authority on this, but—is a function at least somewhat of how many doctoral programs you have. Increasingly, in our field in the United States and around the world, you are looked upon with greater favor in a national and international search for professorial positions if you have a doctorate in our field. That's normal for hiring in the disciplines, right? But it was not normal when I started because every single program was started by someone who came out of a different discipline but was drawn into this because of value affinity, usually.

There have been successive waves of growth in our field. The first was after World War II when the great questions were basically two. The greatest question was: How could people follow Hitler? How could they be convinced to do the god-awful things that they did? So you had people doing research that fed into how we conceive of our field. Like the Yale researcher Stanley Milgram who famously tested people to see what their obedience to authority would be. I'm sure all of you are familiar with this; as historians you have to be! And the basic thing—if anybody didn't come across this—please do check it out—is germinal in our field. I use the word germinal advisedly. The word seminal is the word normally used but that is gender-exclusive; germinal is gender inclusive, so I tend to stick with that.

Milgram studied the extent to which people could be convinced to obey authority or putative or apparent authority by constructing a test where they had to administer increasing doses of electric shock to people they could not see on the other side of a wall. They were ordered to do so by people in what the health care professionals call “the long coats.” These are the long,

white lab coats that indicate a higher status in the medical field and medical research field. They came in with clip boards, long white coats, and issued instructions as though they were an authority. They were all actors in this Yale study. None of them were actually health care professionals (to my knowledge). The people who were told that they were participating on the subjects of the research were actually the subjects of the research themselves. It was found, in contravention or contradiction to all the predictions, that in excess of 90% of people who were convinced that they were being ordered to do so by authorities, would administer increasing dosages of shock to the person supposedly on the other side of the wall.

There was nobody on the other side of the wall! All they were doing were turning up a false shock meter or voltage meter, believing that they administered shocks as punishment for answering questions incorrectly. The people (actually recordings) on the other side of the wall sounded like they were complaining. They were saying "Ow!" They were screaming, they were whimpering, and then they were silent. This kind of test was part of the research that went into our field. World War II really raised great questions. How could people do the European Holocaust? How could people drop atomic bombs on cities full of civilians? How could wave after wave of bombers drop bombs on civilian neighborhoods, neighborhoods they knew to be full of mostly women and children, because those countries—Germany and Japan—were at war? Able-bodied men were off in the military. These were not military targets and the pilots knew this. The bombardiers knew this. These great questions came out of World War II.

The other line of development that fed into construction or emergence of our field was called "ADR." ADR was much more quotidian, much more pedestrian. Alternative Dispute Resolution came out of the field of law. And that was the gradual emergence of the field of mediation out of the profession of the law and attorneys. So in the 1950s there was the first small wave of the beginnings of our field. Then in the mid-to-late 60s, was the second wave, because of the war in Viet Nam. People were very interested in peace because this war in Viet Nam made no sense to almost anybody. It made no sense me even at age 15 in 1965-1966! My friends and I were all like, "This is a stupid war. We are going to get drafted into this war in a couple of years!" And so this whole country was kind of frothing up, like: "What the hell are we thinking!?" So that was the second wave of emergence of peace studies and conflict transformation programs, degrees, awards, minors, certificates, etc.

The third wave came during the Reagan years, during the Euro Missile Crisis, when literally hundreds of thousands of Europeans were blossoming in protest and resistance in the streets. Members of the German Bundestag were climbing fences at the United States air bases in Ramstein and other U.S. bases in Germany. Twelve German judges in full judicial regalia went onto to the Mutlangen U.S. Airforce Base and sat down in blockage in protest of these nuclear weapons that the United States under Reagan's order had placed all around Europe. And the

German judges said: “Our ancestors made horrific mistakes 50 years ago. We are not going to make those same mistakes.” This was another florescence of resistance during Reagan’s Euro Missile Crisis.

Ultimately that resistance in Europe and even in the United States paid off. In December 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev sat down and signed the very, very first nuclear disarmament treaty. Entire classes of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems were outlawed and banned. Those were ordered dismantled. All other nuclear treaties prior to that had been merely what person in DC in the peace lobby called “production schedules.” In other words, we going to cap our ceilings at this level; can we agree to this cap of ceilings. These thousands of nuclear weapons that represent forty times overkill. We can kill everybody on earth 40 times!

So you understand why the field peace studies began its third wave of emergence. That was during the period of time when I was finishing up my stint as a single dad with my sons living under my roof. And then I finally could go to college. I still have students who are single moms, single dads—and I just don’t get how you do it. I could never do it. I put in 12 years as a single dad and I deferred my college education until literally a month after my youngest son graduated from high school. During that period of time, I happily transitioned out of working in the carpenters’ union. I was also a self-employed sub-contractor trying to support my boys and had transitioned into being a full-time community organizer. Two women and I started an organization called Waging Peace in northern Wisconsin. We worked a lot on peace issues, nuclear issues, treaty rights issues with Anishinaabe activists, and sustainability issues.

During that period of time, as I was coming up on finishing my day-to-day single dad occupation, I went to a conference hosted by an historian, Dr. Kent Shifford. I had never heard anyone make erudite information so accessible. I was fairly skilled as a community organizer. I had a lot of hard skills and competencies that I had picked up but I had no serious structural analysis. This is what Dr. Shifford gave to me. I mean, I literally heard him talk a couple of times, sold my house, moved to his town, and studied under him for a little bit over four years. And because I was motivated and a non-traditional student, I literally graduated not even tied with anybody – *summa cum laude*—the only one in my class. Unlike most college students I not only knew what I wanted to do, because I was non-traditional, but also frankly, the month that I started my very first class coincided with the month that I stopped drinking alcohol. As a construction worker, of course, I had beers all the time and so forth. I was just starting college and stopped drinking alcohol which is when most college students start drinking alcohol!

So I had a distinct couple of advantages and graduated ultimately with a degree in peace and conflict studies. That was the first peace and conflict studies program founded in the state of Wisconsin, founded in the 1980s in that third wave by Dr. Shifford. And so to me it was very

fortunate, because since it was founded by an historian, almost all the core classes were history heavy. So I effectively have a peace and conflict studies undergraduate but with a heavy concentration in history. My students normally tell me that that's the piece of what I provide in my classes that is what they had missed in their secondary education.

PAS: How did Oregon catch your attention? Were you in school and you realized that were more peace nerds out here and somehow the word is out? How do we get from the Middle West to the Pacific Northwest?

[25:19]

TH: It's not as intellectual as all that. Basically, I was on the national committee for the War Resisters' League. And in my second term or so on that, I fell in love with a woman who was also on that national committee, who lives in Portland. So even though I had just found my dream job, I actually recruited my own replacement [at Northland College] and moved to Portland. That did not work out, but I had been told that she was my gateway drug to Portland! But before I came here, like I said, I went through this catalog to which I referred earlier and Portland had six programs—whether they were certificates, minors, awards, or degrees. So I basically sent a copy of the first book I wrote and a letter of inquiry to the chairs of all of those programs. I guess this was back in the wild and wooly days, because I ultimately was an adjunct at most of them.

Actually, the only place I did not wind up as an adjunct at in the greater Portland area with a program in our field was George Fox University, because they made you sign some papers that included that you had accepted Jesus Christ as your risen savior. And I said, "I am just a pantheistic tree-hugger, I can't do that!" And they said, "OK, well, we can't hire you." And I said, "Well, what do you do about trying to teach about other religions or other cultures? How do you expect your students to really learn?" "Well, that's just the way it is," they said. I've been told since by very cynical people that I should have lied. Well, no. No thank you.

The places I wound up teaching included Pacific University in Forest Grove, and Marylhurst, bless their recently departed hearts. I also spent 10 years teaching one course, sometimes two, at PCC Sylvania. But as it happened, PSU basically offered me more and more responsibilities. When I started at PSU, the Conflict Resolution program—since you are doing a history of the program, I'm sure you'll get this—but when I started in 2001, Rob Gould was the founder and chair, or director whatever his official title was, and he would have annual retreats. I will never forget the first one I went to at McMenamens and there was Rob, and basically one half-time faculty and 14 adjuncts. It was the Wild West!

I remember being part of the mediation community, which was started by a man named Sid Lezak, a wonderful man who is credited with bringing the field of mediation to Oregon. He had

these monthly luncheons in the McMenamins on Broadway. So I started going to a few when I first came to town and wanted to get to know the mediators. It was a break out back room. The doors were shut and it was basically a free-for-all with mediators. I was sitting at one end of the table and looking around at every single person, and they were all graduates of the PSU Conflict Resolution graduate program! And they were all mediators professionally in town. And most of them had been hired to at least teach one course in our graduate program by Rob. And so it just kind of bonked into my head at that moment and I said, "This is like the Rob Gould version of Andy Warhol, where everybody gets to teach at PSU for 15 minutes!" It was unbelievable to me.

These were talented people and Rob had an eye for rounding up talented people. Basically, the way that he formed his actual full-time faculty was one that he was partially forced into and that he partially invented by himself. Very nimble very flexible very adaptive but his process boiled down to this – hire a raft of people and then look at their evaluations watch them teach and slowly winnow them out. And so the way that I began to think about going to these faculty meetings—and this is back in the day when Rob would have faculty meetings where every adjunct was welcome, because who else was going to go?... was...interesting.

I survived what I began to call "The Lunch of the Long Knives." Each time, either Rob or PSU would say, "Budget cuts! We have to reduce faculty by three." And it was like... well... I'm still here! And this went on and on! And finally, it somewhat stabilized, and you had people like Amanda Byron and me sort of ascend from adjuncts to full-time. Barb Tint was already hired with an idea of becoming full time. Rachel Cunliffe was hired after competing in a national search. It was the first national search and I was on that committee. In fact, I was the only faculty member that attended every one of the demonstration teaching events that went along with that hire. There were several outstanding candidates but Rachel impressed me and I sort of became her champion to try to get her hired because I regard her as an outstanding faculty member. And still do.

PAS: I love the part of winnowing for the most successful teachers. Can you say more about the program's responsiveness to students? What about the appetite or interests of students in peace studies or some of the other skills that were in the tool box of the program faculty at PSU?

TH: I'm not positive that there was a direct 1:1 correlation between eliciting from students which is supposed to be the heart of conflict resolution. We are supposed to be all about listening and eliciting. We have favored figures—like John Paul Lederach at the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame in South Bend Indiana—and he is just kind of known as the czar of "the elicitive." He has developed so many intellectual tools that tell us in our field why we should be so good at this. And yet, I'm not convinced that this is necessarily how our program 100% evolved in the way

that it should have. I think it was a little bit more haphazard than that but at some point, inevitably, you had to start looking at student credit hours and enrollment numbers. That's got to be your number one feedback tool.

Now in the written evaluations from students—even though students are told that no one will see them and that this is anonymized, that nobody looks at them until after your grades are in, etc.—students are rightfully, naturally a little paranoid about that, with exceptions. Oftentimes, especially in standard evaluation forms, they will just praise professors. And to take that seriously is an emotional error and a data error. It's just not actually true that we can walk on water! It's just not a great way to take information in. But I think at least Student Credit Hours can at least provide a rough translation [of student interest].

Gradually these Lunches of the Long Knives proceeded. And part of that was a reflection on who [of the faculty] was drawing students to them. And so for me it became increasingly clear that for a couple of good reasons, I needed to focus on undergraduate students, even though all we had was a graduate degree (a master's degree). Still, to me, that is who was interested in my courses.

The reason for that, I believe, is that I'm driven by values, by peace ideology, and less by well-paying career competencies. I teach hard skills. But frankly, those are not necessarily the skills of middle to upper management, etc. They are more the skills of advocacy, of social movements, and how to organize something and how to get public policy—or corporate policy or institutional policy—changed.

The professionals I teach are generally lower paid, because there is simply less money for such advocacy work. So I differ from most of my colleagues in that. Not that our values or that our affinities are different but our orientation in teaching is different. The graduate program is designed and hopefully will continue to turn out professionals who can enter at mid-level and proceed upward from there.

PAS: I love how nuanced your appreciation for power dynamics is but I have more questions about tone of campus and then I will open up for a probe or two from our students. So on the one hand we have this Portland and Oregon with lots of peace resources and peace sensibility and then you have PSU which was created for veterans. And in fact, one of the things we have been tussling with all term is that peace language and war language are born together; they are almost joined at the hip. Do you have an example or sense of the campus as possibly split between the Oregon of the Mark Hatfields and the PSU of the veteran and war-tested soldier, if you will.

TH: Well, that is interesting to me as somebody who was initially trained in as an activist by veterans of the 1930s. I was born in 1950, so my teachers were from the labor unions and organizers and socialists who started organizing. It was all very, very adversarial-based. It was like we were an inch away from grabbing lead pipes and manning the barricades! That was my initial training. And then I come from a family where I was taught as a boy that you need to be defiant of authority sometimes.

[40:34]

So with this training, all based on adversarial stances, and having brought that training with me into peace justice and sustainability work, I soon found other strands of training, really starting with my immersion into nonviolent resistance back in my 30s, that were very different from mine. People were coming out of the historic peace churches, a bunch of Quakers, and suddenly I'm in the peace movement with organizers who are nice people. And they are trying to call people "in" rather than call them "out." They were very different and they hit me like a ton of bricks. I realized that I have to start unlearning stuff while at the same time, learn new things. And that, to me, is the hallmark of this field of conflict resolution. It shows up in bold relief in Portland in the history, and even currently.

I see both of these strands and I struggle to balance them in my own life. [chuckles] I wasn't around Portland in the 60s, but I love the recent history focusing on the year 1970 in the *PSU Magazine*. The founder of our program, Rob Gould, will really be able to shed light on this because he spent eight years working for the American Friends Service Committee as a draft counselor right on this campus during that period of time. He is a Portland native. His elementary school—which everybody knows who has ever talked to him, because he never tires of telling the story—is now Shattuck Hall. So his grounding in Portland is pretty complete. Those very, very hot and heavy years were part of it. He was in Portland when there were all kinds of bombings, barricades, and a very polarized environment. I can tell you as someone who got a conscientious objection status officially as an 18-year-old during the war in Viet Nam, those were very polarized times in my community as well, and across the country.

It was very hard to mend the fences between the returning veterans and the resisters. Some of us did so pretty quickly. I felt that the peace movement in general tried to do so pretty quickly to the point where—I don't know—sometime watch the movie *Born on the Fourth of July*. It is starring Tom Cruise in an historically accurate role, playing Ron Kovic, a victim of friendly fire in Viet Nam who came back as a quadriplegic, in a chair, and who wound up being one of the leaders of the peace movement. And so, during that period of time, oftentimes you could see peace marchers with Veterans for Peace at the front, leading the peace march.

That is exactly what we did in Portland in opposition to the planned invasion of Iraq. In the fall of 2002, when George Bush and Dick Cheney announced their plans to invade Iraq based on what we well knew to be a pack of lies—two great big lies in particular: that Sadaam had WMD [weapons of mass destruction] which we all knew he did not—and that Sadaam was about to give his WMD to Bin Laden, when in fact Bin Laden had a death fatwah on Sadaam Hussein and Sadaam Hussein had outlawed Al-Qaeda in Iraq. So those of us in the peace community absolutely knew it—and frankly, most Europeans knew it, too—but the bulk of the people who did not know anything about it were regular people who listened to mainstream media in the United States.

We began to organize seriously and veterans were almost always at the very front of our peace marches with big banners proclaiming themselves Veterans for Peace. So that sort of polarization was reduced quite a bit because of how the peace movement welcomed veterans who had had a peace conversion. And by the way, there have been two larges waves of veterans who have come into American institutions of higher education since the field of Peace and Conflict Studies emerged. One wave was following the end of the Viet Nam war, lots and lots combat veterans took advance of the GI Bill and there was a big wave. My father was a professor then and he had lots and lots of veterans in his classrooms and in his program.

The same thing has happened now, of course. I have lots of veterans in my classes. It's very interesting. Sometimes they come in and start fighting me and by the end of the term, most of the time, we are on the same page. And a lot of them have started out with basically some version of: "I was in the military. I went through a lot of experiences in the military. I came out the other end of the military thinking that there had to be better way to resolve conflict. So I decided to take one of your classes!" This I think has led to I think a pretty high percentage of the Conflict Resolution students being veterans. Their opinions are highly respected and highly regarded by everybody in our classes. But the polarization in society today I haven't witnessed—I don't even think Viet Nam was as polarized as what we seen now, thanks to Donald Trump.

And I say "thanks to him" because I think nobody who is exhibiting this rise in hate crime, rise in hate language, I don't think he created anybody new doing this. I think what he did was give everybody who was already in possession of those proclivities permission to do this stuff. And so when we see this well underway, we are well down the road of polarization. To me, the worst possible outcome in the end would be if Donald Trump loses a relatively close election, claims "victory," and then we have an armed rebellion in his favor to basically do a coup on the United States democracy. To me, everything is a jump ball right now.

PAS: Well, I don't know how much more heartbreak I can take, is all I'll say to that. Thank you, Tom. I want to open up to students who would like to probe or ask a question.

LIZA I don't have a question but I just wanted to say I thought it was so interesting how you laid out SCHADE: these different waves, including that World War II conversation. We have been thinking about anti-Viet Nam stuff so it was interesting to get that earlier background on it. The perspective of the wave helps me picture it, because I am such a visual person. So thinking about an exhibit makes me wonder what we can do with that timeline.

TH: My mentor, Dr. Kent Shifford, a historian, taught me to think in terms of historical periodicity. So that has flavored my thinking about this. I haven't really heard anybody else talk in these waves, even my field. This is just my own observation.

A.BERG: This is a mini-question. At the very beginning I heard you say conflict transformation instead of conflict resolution. And I was just wondering if that was on purpose or do you see those terms as interchangeable?

TH: They are interchangeable to the state legislature [chuckles] which has had this conflict resolution designation--which is one of the reasons that we had to use that term. I will refer again to John Paul Lederach who has argued for maybe 25 years that we need to change the name of our field to conflict transformation. His logic, which I subscribe to, is that conflict is inevitable, conflict is wonderful, and conflict is basically the source of most of our creative impulses and products. Without conflict there would be very few artists; without conflict you would have very few interesting works of fiction. Without conflict you don't have really hard driving problem solving, I think. I believe that he was correct in that analysis, but he said is that what we have to do is *understand* conflict. That conflict exists is never going to be in question, it's only a matter of how we manage it.

So the idea is to identify where we find destructive conflict, conflict that results in hurt people even all the way to dead people, wars, and—not to pick on lawyers—but you know the old joke: “Who is the poorest man in town?” It's the only lawyer. “Who are the two richest people in town?” The two lawyers after the second one moved in, so they could fight about it! This adversarial system in the law resulted in some lawyers who do not like that aspect of it being drawn to starting this field I talked about, Alternative Dispute Resolution. They wanted to make the law transform destructive conflict into constructive conflict. So that you have the possibility of a win-win rather than a lose-little / lose-big outcome. It's like what I tell students—or at least what I used to when I used to teach introduction to conflict resolution—is how at one point all the insurance payouts had been made after 9/11 to the World Trade Center. And two thirds of those payments had been spent, and nothing had been reconstructed. All of those of those first two-thirds had gone to lawyers fighting about everything.

So this is a dysfunctional system. When we look at an adversarial based system whether it is in the law or whether it is in the militarism that results in war. The idea is to say how we can bring about processes of conflict management that transform them into creative collaborative problem-solving exercises that put everybody on the same team. So, say Alex and I are in conflict, and Oona is our mediator. She would do enough assessment to find Alex and my shared values or shared interests, and then she builds off that to ultimately result in a mediated outcome, where we both gain instead of we both lose.

PAS: Eloquently put. I'm afraid I have to call us to a close, but I want to thank you, Tom, and everyone here today for such a beautiful, eloquent, and illuminating discussion of this rich history which we are now all part of. That's one of the great unintended consequences of history projects: that we are now all linked into the story. So thank you.