

# GIVE ME SHELTER



## Architecture Takes on the Homeless Crisis

Edited by Sofia Borges / R. Scott Mitchell

Forward by Mayor Eric Garcetti

MADWORKSHOP

**ORO**  
EDITIONS



# THE BOOT CAMP

It is easy to assume why someone is homeless. Based on that assumption, it is easy to assume you know the proper design solution to help. In order to avoid designing at a distance, the class underwent a three week homelessness boot camp. Organizations such as Skid Row Housing Trust, Downtown Women's Center, The Midnight Mission, and others opened up their doors. Prominent figures from Betty Chinn to Gary Blasi and City Librarian John Szabo to Michael Maltzan all played key roles during this intensive immersion into the topic.

**This page:** Homeless activist Ted Hayes consulting with students, Architect Michael Maltzan speaking to students.

**Opposite page:** A view of Skid Row and downtown Los Angeles from the Midnight Mission.





# TED HAYES

*“Homeless are more affected by the environment than anyone.”*









*In 1984, Ted Hayes decided that the best way to help the homeless was to become homeless himself. During his time on the streets, Ted founded Justiceville and Dome Village—the first organized homeless communities of their kind. Although dismantled in 2006, Dome Village remains the longest standing, self-governed homeless collective in Los Angeles to this day.*

### **What started your journey into the world of homelessness?**

TH: Dr. King coined the universal idea that we are to judge ourselves not by our outward appearances, races, and so forth, but by the content of our character. I was brought up in a family that cared about other people. My mother and father always taught us to stand up for people who cannot stand up for themselves. I carried that idea all the way through high school and almost became the first black senior class president of my town in 1969. But I decided not to run. Instead I helped someone else win. I wanted to have a committee in student council that represented the C-D-E-F students, the underperforming students, the bad guys, the smokers in the bathroom, the outcasts. You know, guys like me. And I got it. And I built a link to the Mayor and called it “The Grievance Committee.” Then I became very spiritual. I always fussed and complained about what’s wrong with the world. We all talk about what we see is wrong but we never offer solutions. We expect other people to come up with the solutions of what we criticize. I realized that if I care so much about the poor and the homeless, I needed to go be with them. Fix it myself. So I left my family and went to downtown LA, and saw the tent city of 1984/85 that was started by Harry Rogers, who would become one of my mentors. It was the Christmas holiday season. There were two big white tents across the street from the *LA Times* building and City Hall. The moment I got there I had an epiphany that this was going to be my work for the rest of my life. So I began to sleep on the sidewalks. That’s when Justiceville was born. Justiceville was the first organized encampment politically. The idea was to empower the people. Not give them a handout or hand up but to empower their hands to do for themselves and for others. And it was working!

We had designed a transitional housing concept of geodesic domes with Buckminster Fuller’s grandson Jamie Snyder. He came to Justiceville and we became friends. Jamie had heard about us in the news and we were talking about using domes as an idea for transitional housing. So he came down to Skid Row! Clean cut, white dude. And he came

down, no fear, no nothing, and sat right there in the encampment with us. He ate with us, we hung out. And he said, “You guys are on to something. We’d love to help you out.” About this time a guy named Craig Chamberlain, a Vietnam vet who studied under Bucky Fuller, showed up. I thought, “this guy’s a genius!” He created the ‘Omnisphere’ off of Bucky Fuller’s Geodesic Dome. Jamie Snyder had a Geodesic Dome at his house in the Palisades that Craig had designed. He let us use that for a reception.

We had created a microcosm. We had cleaned up the street between 5th and 6th Street on Gladys Avenue. That’s where we were. Right next door to the “The Hippie Kitchen,” the Catholic Workers Kitchen where they feed the homeless. We camped there. We were in the news all the time. We could call press conferences. We were the darling of the press. We had a telephone put in and a camping shack. We got four sanitary companies to set up four toilets for us. We cleaned up the alleyway and put up these toilets and secured them. We even started an auto detailing business. But by the time we really got going, the local social services providers went to Mayor Tom Bradley, the first black mayor of Los Angeles, and said “you need to shut that down.” And Tom Bradley said “I can’t shut it down. I have nothing to do with that.” And they said, “How about going to the County then? And getting to the property owner...” His name was Ernie Doizaki. He was a great hero to us. He had inherited the American Fish Company downtown from his dad and when we found out that he owned the property we asked him if we could stay there for one dollar per year. He said yes. He loved what we were doing, we cleaned the neighborhood up.

### **Why did people want to shut down Justiceville?**

TH: If you think about it, we’re talking about strengthening the hands of the poor. In other words, people need the poor and the homeless to feel good about themselves. And we threatened the whole system. They knew that if people became self-sufficient that there’d be no more need for food kitchens, transitional housing, dome villages, tiny houses, any of this stuff. So they shut it down. They told the County to



go see Ernie Doizaki and tell Ernie, "If you don't evict these people, we're going to run a health inspection on your food factory. And you will not pass." So Ernie got spooked and he called me up and I said, "Don't worry. Go ahead and evict us. We will always speak highly of you, but we have to be arrested." He agreed and he came down the day of the eviction. Police everywhere, helicopters, news cameras...I'd never seen so much press in my life. And there we were. A federal judge called up Daryl Gates, the police chief at the time and a legendary "bad cop," and said that they were watching the procedures and that he better not harm us. This was pre-Rodney King. LAPD already had a bad reputation then. So when they came to arrest us, we walked out of Justiceville with our hands up.

**What was the assimilation process like starting as an outsider and ending up as a leader of a group of people who were not homeless by choice like you but by necessity?**

TH: It was scary. I've never been so scared in my life. It was just me now. I had to get used to sleeping on the sidewalk and in unsafe situations. We had to cover our heads with our blankets because of the rats running by all night long. You have to get used to the hygiene of the streets. You can go for days, weeks, without water or a change of clothes. The people that eat out of garbage cans eat there because they'd rather not wait in the food lines. And you think "how are you gonna eat garbage?" Well, you acclimate. I had never slept on a hard sidewalk in my life. But after a while, I could sleep anywhere.

Eventually I had friends where I could go get a shower, a good night's sleep. Or I'd go visit my family in Riverside. You need those outlets.

**How did you get people to trust you and to start looking to you for guidance and leadership?**

TH: I served them. I was the Servant Director of Justiceville. I cleaned up trash, paper...I washed their dishes. I'd be up til 2:30am some nights doing that stuff. I'd do security for them, make sure they'd sleep at night. I'd go get food, bring it in. Firewood. It got to the point where people began to wonder, "who is this guy?" I didn't talk to them, I'd just do the work. Cause I knew, you don't just walk in, you don't know these people, and they don't know you. So I won them over. They trusted me. I knew it was really starting to happen one night around the campfire. I was talking about my philosophy, and they were listening. One guy started to interrupt and the others stopped him, "Quiet! Ted's talking!" It got to the point where I led the meetings. They wanted to call me their king



**Above:** Ted constructing Dome Village circa 1993.

but I said "I'm not here to be your king. I'm here to be your servant. And I expect you to serve one another." That's how I got my leadership.

**How long did that take?**

TH: Maybe a couple of months. It's tribal. The leadership came because I earned it. But it's hard to come out once you've transitioned into that world. You've found freedom. You do what you want to do.

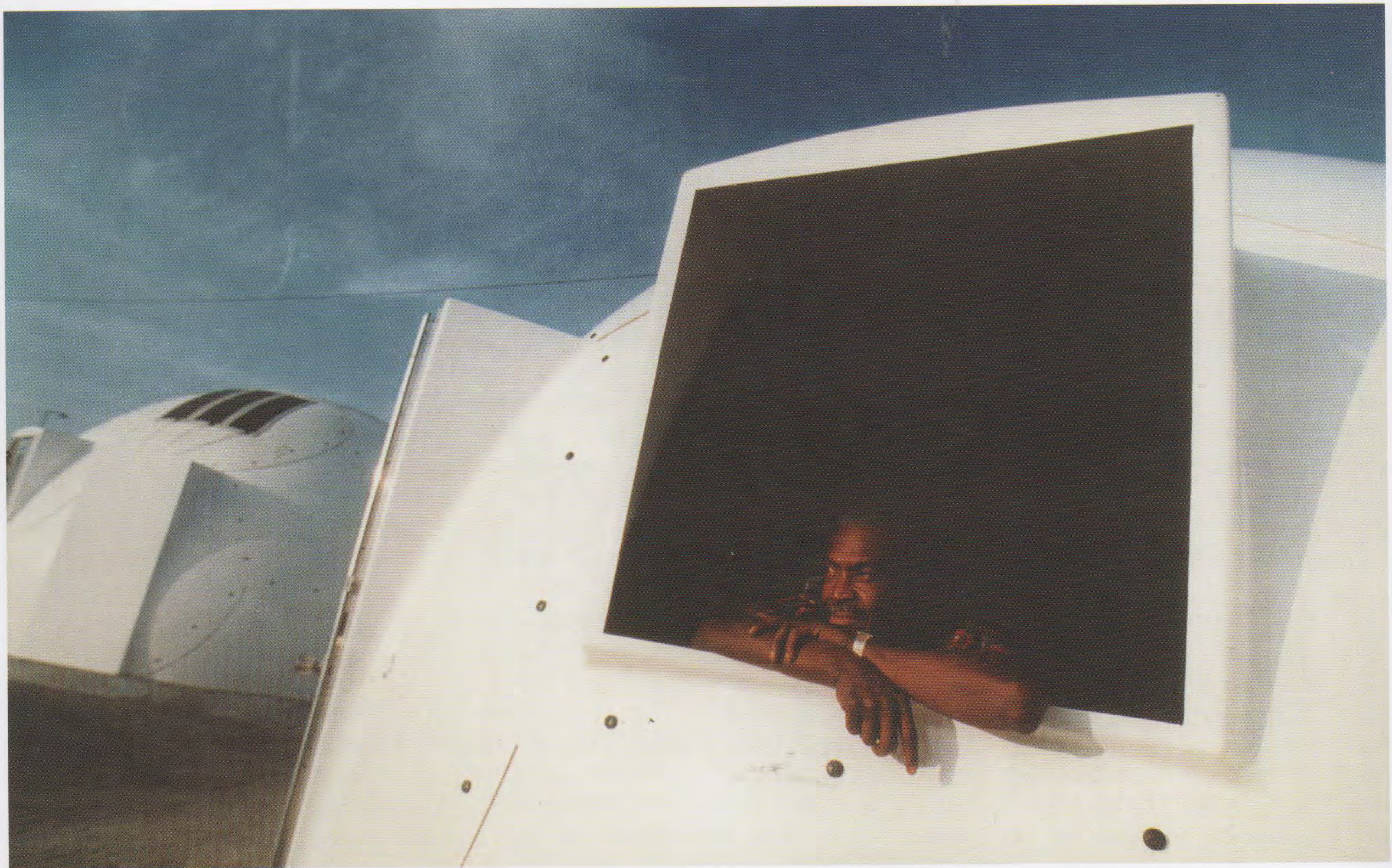
**How did you locate Ernie's land?**

TH: It was a vacant lot. It used to be a playground for children. Tires and sand. It was run by a teenage Latino gang called 'The Flats.' So when we got to the property we tried to find the owner. We went to his office and introduced ourselves. We told him what we were doing and he said "I like what you're doing. The street's cleaner..." But it started out as a random site.

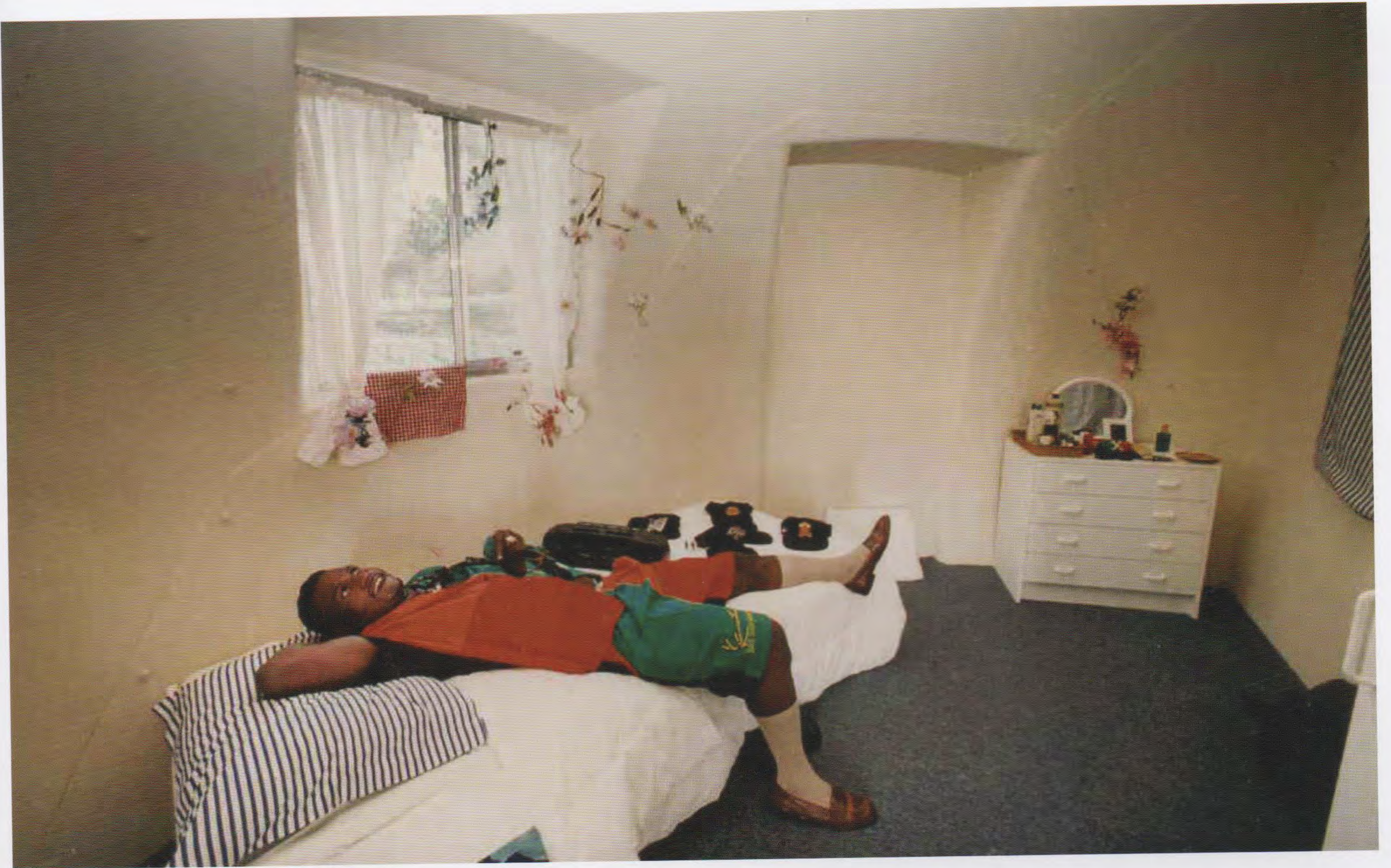
**How long did Justiceville last?**

TH: Five months. From January 2nd to May 10th of 1985.











### **How many residents lived in Justiceville?**

TH: It got up to about 73 residents. Men, women, children, pets. We were all there. Overcrowded. It was a very small lot compared to where we moved next.

You could fit Justiceville into Dome Village three or four times. Almost half of the population was Hispanic.

### **How did you decide who got to be a resident of Justiceville? What was that process like?**

TH: If someone wanted to come in, we'd make space. As long as you followed our guidelines—participate in doing chores, keep your area clean, help with nighttime security. We were unlike all the other shelters because you didn't have to be drug-free to come in here. We'd work with you. But you can't cause trouble.

### **You've spoken about the importance of not having temporary solutions become permanent ones. If Justiceville hadn't been cut short, how would people have cycled through this community?**

TH: It was primitive back then but when I went into homelessness, I did it consciously. I'm a civil rights activist. I had known for years that the US military had shut down hundreds of military bases across the country. The key to ending homelessness is space, land. We have the space, let's use it. I've always believed that we have to decentralize our urban centers around the world if humanity is going to survive. And homeless people, their condition warrants the ability to get up and move. They don't have roots like other people have. The poorest people go first and then we follow. That's always how it's been. Justiceville and Dome Village were only temporary. These were a way station, a temporary stop. We must keep moving. We don't need anymore programs. We need an end to the programs. But people keep giving money and there are more homeless and more programs. Why? Because there are no places to put these people. Do you want them in your neighborhood? No! "I'll give you a check to put them in their neighborhood!" [points in the other direction] And I understand that. I don't condemn people for being NIMBYs. The homeless can be NIMBYs too. We exist on a much more primordial, primitive plane of existence. We don't think about tomorrow. We think about right now. But I knew going in that we were going to have to resolve homelessness. We were going to have to have an exiting process to transition people out of this world and into the next.

### **What happened after your eviction from Justiceville?**

TH: We became urban nomads. We would travel from spot to spot looking for new vacant areas. We'd camp out, the police would come and chase us off. We'd go somewhere else, they'd chase us off. Until one day we went over to Crown Hill, now some of the most expensive land in the city. It was a great place to camp. We were out of sight and surrounded by flowers, bushes, trees....From there we'd go down into the city to do our lobbying. One day, a Herald Examiner reporter found us. He wanted to do an exclusive story. I said, "Ok but you must not tell where we are." And of course this knucklehead told the press. The property owner came out and said, "I know you guys are here, I know who you are. I've heard about Ernie...So just be quiet." But then it hits the newspapers and we've gotta go. So the police came and three of us got arrested. Two army veterans and me. And we went to court. We still stayed on sidewalks and streets but we just kept moving around town. We never could find a decent place. Eventually we found the Bradbury Building where we worked out of for a while.

During this time we went to trial. When we'd do an act of civil disobedience we wanted to get to court to present our case to the public. Jim Hahn, the City Attorney, knew this and would always arrest us, smack us on the hand, and let us go. This particular time, he decided to prosecute us. And we were like "Thank you!"

### **You wanted to go to jail?**

TH: Yeah, man! Trespassing! If we went to jail, our story gets out there. We won that court case. The ACLU got involved, and we whipped that DA bad. We were found not guilty. That was the beginning of what you see downtown and all across the city. We won our case on the defense of necessity. We began by saying, "Your honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, yes the streets are a bad place to live. Yes, the sidewalks are filthy and dangerous. Yes, you're right about all of this and it's oftentimes trespassing." But then we started painting the pictures of the missions and the shelters, and how bad that is...what's going on in the hotels...And they realized that we were better off in the streets, the sidewalks, and the encampments than in those shelters. So that created more red tape in the city about how to approach homeless encampments. About a year and a half later, we would camp out where the old tent city was across the street from the LA Times building in that vacant lot. In the daytime, we'd leave the lot and go to City Hall. We'd line up all of our shopping carts very neatly and leave two people there to do



security. The rest of us would go out foraging and doing our activism. Well I went home to my family for the weekend to get a rest. When I get back they tell me the police came with the city management and they took everything and threw it in the garbage. So we ran to City Council and they got on Tom Bradley. Suddenly we're meeting with all these big guns. Attorney Jim Davis found out about us, great guy, legendary, and he came to our rescue. We sued the city. Settled out of court. Each person got \$500. This created more stringent laws about how you approach homeless encampments. What's starting to happen now is homeless people are feeling a little bit more emboldened about encamping. Then we had another case. That's when the ACLU and all the other activists realized that we've got something here. That's why to this day, Mayor Garcetti has told the police to stand down. Do not harass the homeless encampments. You can't touch 'em because of what we did.

**We put the tiny homes that you came to see in an encampment in Vernon. A couple of weeks later, the city came and bulldozed the encampment, tiny homes and all. Why do you think that happened?**

TH: Rogue actions still happen, but you can't do that kind of thing downtown. Isolated encampments are still vulnerable. You're not protected out there. Probably the neighborhood didn't want it. But there are guidelines that have to be followed before you can do that. You've gotta post the warning signs, you've gotta go talk to them, you've gotta send in social service providers to help find them a place to live...But places that are kind of out there, what happened at your encampment can still happen. But you can't touch them downtown. You can't touch them in Venice. You can't touch them in Santa Monica... some places in Beverly Hills. I'm starting to call them "the untouchables." They have more right than you do. We warned the city. We warned Tom Bradley. We warned Richard Riordan. We warned all of them. We gave them the blueprint and said "If you don't implement this or something like this, you're going to have a big problem." Where are these people going to go? There are more people falling into homelessness than leaving. You're creating a stagnant pond here. Homelessness is not going to get better. It only stands to get worse. Even people with money cannot find housing.

**How did you start working in the Bradbury Building?**

TH: We stayed on the 3rd floor for a couple of months. One of our allies downtown in the Business Improvement District told us that there was some space in the building and talked to them on our behalf. Homeless people in the Bradbury Building? [laughs]

**How did Dome Village finally get launched?**

TH: One day, we saw a news interview with David V. Adams, the owner of the TWA building on Wilshire Blvd. He had to remove some homeless people from his property and he was saying that he didn't want to do it, that these people needed a place to go. He cared. So I called him up. The next morning we had a meeting and I told him all of my ideas. His response was, "You need a business credibility partner. And that's me. We're going to do your Dome Village." He gave us an office space. Built us a board. Helped us find the property between 8th and 9th St on the East Side of the 110 freeway two blocks from where Staples Center is now. There was already an encampment out front in the cul de sac. We found out who the property owner was and met with him. Arco president and Chairman of the Board Lod Cook tracked me down and I went to speak to him and his board about our ideas. He asked me how much we needed. I said \$250,000. He wrote me a check right there. That paid for the domes, platforms, electricity, and the first few months of operations. From there, Dome Village was maintained by a mixture of Federal, state, and city funding, donations, and volunteers. Then we went to Mayor Richard Riordan and told him we got the money and the property. So he helped us get the Department of Building and Safety on board. And to everyone's chagrin, we did the impossible. They put the bar so high that no one could reach it.

But we had the plans. Now we had the money, which we started investing into the domes. This was around 1992/93. We were almost ready to break ground on Dome Village and I decided to run for mayor. Dome Village was a main part of my platform. That's how I met Richard Riordan and why he helped us out when the time came.

**How many domes were in Dome Village?**

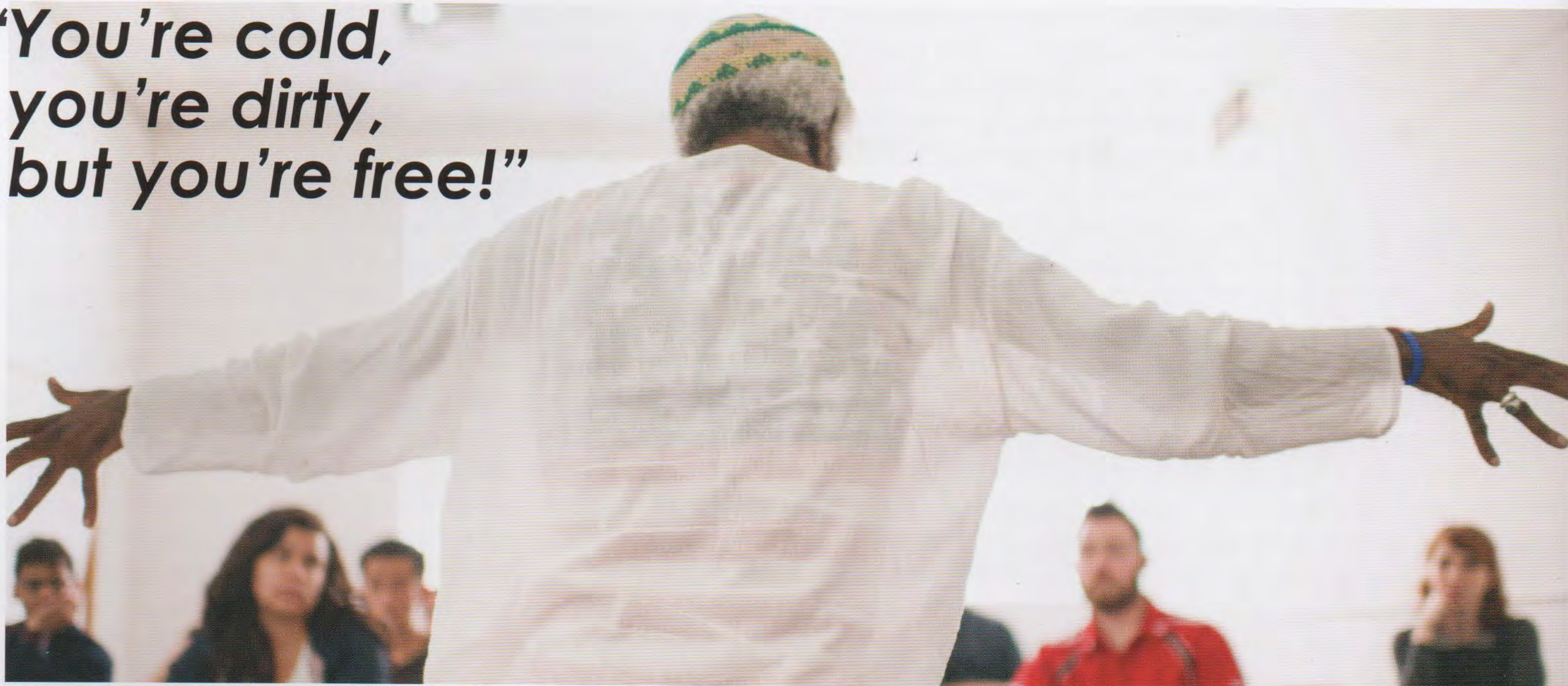
TH: Twenty.

**How did you deal with capacity?**

TH: We never had more than thirty people at a time, plus pets. You want to maintain a sense of community. When you have those big facilities, nobody knows anyone. If you create the proper environment, people can figure things out for themselves. But never give freedom to human beings. They will not value it. You make them earn freedom. We had to change our rules and make the people earn the privilege to live in Dome Village. Then we had more order. People stayed from a year to 18 months.



**“You’re cold,  
you’re dirty,  
but you’re free!”**



**Above:** Ted Hayes speaking to the MADWORKSHOP Homeless Studio at USC. **Right:** Dome Village in its heyday (Dome Village photos courtesy of Ted Hayes).

#### **How did you pick who would live there?**

TH: Ronda Flazbaum was the main person that screened people. She was the program director. We couldn't take people with really serious mental issues. We didn't have the proper facilities for them. The people we could accept had to function within the community at a basic level. We had limits.

#### **Did you have plumbing?**

TH: Yes, in the kitchen, the showers, and the laundry dome. We had a shared kitchen and shower facility. We had a bathroom facility for women and one for men, wheelchair accessible.

#### **What kind of programs did you have on-site?**

TH: We had a garden club. We had a cyber dome. People would donate computers to us and we had internet there in Dome Village in the mid 1990s. People would come in from the surrounding community for our internet access, computer classes, word processing classes. We had holiday events to engage low income communities. We had a health fair, community cleanups. We had a community center, a skate club...Tree plantings. The Compton Cricket Club. We let the homeless give back to the community. Imagine that.

#### **How did you see Dome Village evolving over time?**

TH: Dome Village was supposed to last no more than three years. Ideally there would have been several Dome Villages constantly moving across the city like a vacuum cleaner. We'd pick people up off the streets, stabilize them, and then move them to a large facility elsewhere to begin the resocialization process out of homelessness. We did not want to be a burden on anyone's community. Put it down, move it. Put it down, move it. That's how it was supposed to go. But we got blocked. And for thirteen years we languished on that same corner. That was not supposed to happen. I was so happy when the property owner finally said "I want you out of here," and raised our rent from \$2,500 to \$18,000 a month. That was 2006. I was done with this.

#### **What happened to the domes?**

TH: At first we thought about moving the whole thing but we ended up selling most of them on eBay. \$3,000 a piece.

#### **If the communities you built had lasted, what were you planning next?**

TH: We probably would have had a lot more Dome Villages. We should have been done by now. All this work was 30 years ago. We should have solved homelessness in America and been moving on to helping solve it in other countries. If we can create a model that works in this country, everybody will follow.









**MADWORKSHOP** x **USC**Architecture

**GIVE ME SHELTER** documents the work of the MADWORKSHOP Homeless Studio at the USC School of Architecture and their solutions for tackling the Los Angeles homeless crisis through design, compassion, and humanity. The book features exclusive content from leaders in the field including Michael Maltzan, Ted Hayes, Betty Chinn, Gregory Kloehn, Skid Row Housing Trust, and many more. Paired with a forward by Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles, Give Me Shelter provides an in-depth look at how design can bridge the gap in services to get people off the streets and into housing sooner. In 2015, Los Angeles declared a state of emergency on homelessness. Since then, homelessness has increased by nearly 30%. Our homeless epidemic is more than a humanitarian crisis, it is a call for action. The book tells the story of eleven 4th year architecture students and their two instructors' journey through the world of homelessness as they tackle real world design solutions for emergency stabilization housing. From nomadic and temporary shelters to the city supported and award winning Homes for Hope, Give Me Shelter follows the MADWORKSHOP Homeless Studio and their designs from the encampment all the way to City Hall.

