-...go up there?

Behind the theater?

-When the stakes are good wages

and precious jobs,

sometimes union reformers

end up dead on the floor.

A possible motive but perhaps

not the only explanation

for the killings of

Gene Viernes, union dispatcher,

and Silme Domingo,

unions secretary treasurer.

To their friends

and union brothers,

Domingo and Viernes

are martyrs.

Many believe

they were gunned down

for running the union

by the book.

No kickbacks, no sweetheart

deals with the canners.

-I don't know.

I think we're all sort of

in that extended period

of shock

for a while where

you're sort of doing things

and you're making sure

that things are going right.

But we weren't really --

Nobody took, like, time off

and went away and grieved

or didn't do what needed

to be done

in order to carry

on the work of the union.

You know, I think when people

die over what you're doing,

you get -- you get committed

to make it happen.

-I will say that that period

that we were in

after the murders

was kind of a resurgence

of a democratic,

progressive union

within Local 37.

-I think the -- you know,

the measure of good leadership

is that they train other people.

And so I think when --

You know, I think that

that's what they

underestimated when they killed

Gene and Silme,

that they thought

by killing Gene and Silme

that they were going

to kill the movement.

And we had built -- we had

built the reform movement.

We had built a movement

within the -- within the union.

And so they took them out,

but they didn't stop

the movement.

-Silme Domingo

and Gene Viernes,

two names which are synonymous

with Seattle

Asian-American activism

and fishing cannery

workers rights.

They were two men who,

despite their differences

and personality,

were united in their dedication

to community service

and labor reform.

-You couldn't ask for two

more different people,

but the one constant

between the two of them

was that they were

very dedicated to the cause

of reforming the union.

So they shared that

very strongly together.

Silme was very --

more urban,

very gregarious, outgoing.

Gene was a country boy

raised in Wapato.

-Wapato.

A small farming town

in the Yakima Valley

of Central Washington.

It is from this tight-knit

agricultural community

that Gene Viernes and other

Filipino-American laborers

traveled to Alaska to work

in salmon canneries

during the summer months.

-Yes, I did grow up

in Yakima Valley.

I was born in Yakima.

And my folks lived in --

lived in the Lower Valley.

They were farmers.

And had four brothers

working on the farms,

And at that time during the '70s

and even during the '60s,

the employers of the Alaska

seafood industry

did a lot of recruiting

down in these areas,

Wapato and also

in the San Joaquin Valley

in Stockton and Delano, California.

There was a lot of -- a lot

of prospective cannery workers

there because the employer knew

that they -- they can do

the grueling work that

was necessary in the industry.

-Gene was the eldest

sibling of nine,

the first of his family

to follow his father,

Felix Viernes, up to Alaska

in 1967.

He was 15 years old.

Friends remember him

as down-to-earth and low-key.

-Gene was more

of a country guy,

and he didn't really care

what he looked like.

He'd wear this Levi jacket,

he'd wear jeans,

he'd have this white hat

or -- what did they call --

painter's hat.

He'd have that all the time.

And he would

never wear a suit or tie.

He would be really very casual

all the time.

-A star wrestler

and excellent student,

Gene took an interest in history

and enrolled

in the recently established

ethnic studies program

at Central Washington

State College.

-He had so many books, you know?

He was always buying them,

and he'd amassed

big libraries of it,

and -- and he'd know it all.

You know, everything he read, he'd have it up there.

It's kind of different

the way he was.

'Cause he could meet people,

and he'd have them figured out in no time flat.

Within a few minutes,

he's figured them out,

and he's already trying

to help them correct

one of their problems.

[ Chuckles ]

-Smart and intuitive,

he was also a natural leader.

-One thing he was,

he was very persistent.

I mean, he would just keep

after things until he got them.

And, I mean, you know,

one person's leader is

another person's bossy person.

[ Chuckles ]

He was the kind of guy,

we were working,

and they would say, "I need someone to drive a jitney,"

and we didn't know

how to drive a jitney,

but he would raise his hand

and say, "I'll drive it."

And then he had a new skill,

and then he was always

to go one more step.

And so, a lot of times,

he became the leader

because he had that skill

or he was willing

to take that risk.

-Gene was very energetic,

very forceful.

He was a small package,

but he was very forceful.

You know,

he knew what he wanted,

you know,

what needed to be done.

And I'd fight him tooth and nail

for my

share of the power, but...

[ Laughs ]

But, yeah, like I said,

I really respected him.

It grew, you know, as he did

things like head up to Alaska,

and he just became my idol,

you know, my role model.

-Going off to work

in the canneries in Alaska

was a rite of passage

for many of these Wapato boys.

It wasn't just

an opportunity to work.

It was also a chance

to connect to the past.

-Basically, Alaska was kind of

a connection to our parents.

And we were really aware

of our -- of our parents',

you know, travels and journeys

through life,

you know,

coming from the Philippines

and working the migrant trails,

and Alaska was part of that.

-As early as 1917,

over 100 canneries in Alaska

packed more than half

the world's supply

of canned salmon,

a multimillion dollar industry

that only continue to grow

throughout the decades.

Filipino seasonal workers

competed for these backbreaking

yet lucrative jobs,

and their work ethic

was passed on to their sons.

-Our forefathers actually

got started working

in the Alaska seafood industry

and then graduated up

to the next generation,

which I'm a second-generation

Filipino-American,

in that it was pretty much

a rite of passage,

in terms of going to work

in the canneries.

-It was a rite of passage

for those from the city, too.

Many Filipino Alaskan cannery workers were from Seattle,

and one of them was

a charismatic young man

named Silme Domingo.

-Silme was very much

a big-city guy, right?

-Silme scared the hell

out of me.

[ Laughs ]

He used to wear his,

you know, black coat,

and he had that big black hat,

and he had the high boots,

and he was just

kind of a tough guy.

-He had his hangouts,

which I used to hang out

with him.

Liked to party, you know?

-It was almost infectious

when you were around him

that you would have a good time.

-Silme was stylish and popular,

and he was keenly interested

in the world around him.

His charm transferred over

to community activism.

As a University of Washington student in 1971,

he joined the growing community

newspaper movement

which helped cement

his commitment to social change.

-And as much as he was a guy

with a kind of goofball

sense of humor,

he was very serious

about getting done

what he wanted to get done.

-In some ways, Silme was a bigger-than-life personality.

Had a lot of friends,

a lot of acquaintances.

Came from a recognized

Alaskero family.

-Filipino seasonal workers

who traveled up to Alaska

to work in the canneries

were called Alaskeros.

Silme's father, Nemesio,

who hailed from

Ilocos Sur province,

was part of the first large wave

of immigrants

from the Philippines

in the 1920s.

Silme and his older

brother, Nemesio Jr.,

both became actively involved

in the Local 37,

the Cannery Workers Union

their father's generation

had helped establish.

-International Longshoremen's Warehousemen's Union.

And the Local 37 was the branch, the Seattle branch,

but it was -- it consisted

mostly of Filipinos.

I think over 90%, 95%.

-It was the era when

post-World War II-generation

Alaskeros were beginning to work alongside the elder generation.

Younger Filipino-Americans,

like Gene and Silme,

began to realize that

they shared a common history

and that they needed

to work together

to fight for social change,

despite their personal

differences.

-But they were very similar

in terms of their...

thinking, right?

Silme was really out there,

just really social,

and Gene was really quiet,

very into his writings and very,

you know, mild-mannered and...

They were very different,

but the combination

itself was dynamic.

-Their passion and determination

for social change

was to become part of a decades-old continuum

of union activism

around Alaska cannery workers

and Filipino community.

First-generation Filipino men

are often called manos,

a respectful Ilocano term

meaning "older brother."

It was the manos who led

the first workers' rights

struggles as part of Local 37.

Their leaders included writer

Carlos Bulosan,

author of the seminal novel

"America is in the Heart,"

and Chris Mensalvas' father,

Chris Sr.,

the president of the Local 37,

during a very turbulent time

for labor unions.

-He was president of Local 37

for I don't know how many years.

As long as I've known my dad,

he was always

involved in union work.

And the reason why he didn't

go to the Philippines,

what I heard is that he was told

by some of his

labor contacts

in the Philippines,

that he would be assassinated

as soon

as he got to the Philippines.

-Within the Local,

there had been, you know,

in the '50s,

a number of the officers

were brought up on un-American activities and were --

they tried to deport them

at the same time

they were trying to deport

the president

of the International Longshore

and Warehouse Union,

Harry Bridges.

-Founder and leader of the ILWU,

Harry Bridges was one of

the most important

labor leaders of the era.

The second-generation

Local 37 members

were just starting to get

an idea of the legacy

of the struggles

of their forefathers.

-Didn't really know anything

about the union

except that was the place

we paid our dues,

and that's why it kind of --

where we got dispatched.

And I knew my dad

was attorney for the union.

He talked a number of times about Harry Bridges.

My dad talking about Christmas,

all of us and Harry Bridges,

is sort of like

very different people

in very --

from very different

walks of life

but who had a very significant

impact on

the West Coast labor movement.

-So, there was

a lot of political ties

within the Local.

And so a lot of the early fights

were around political struggles,

political issues about

which way the Local should go.

So, Silme being

very political himself,

found that very interesting

and really sought out

the stories from the elders

in the Local.

And Gene was very much

a historian.

So Gene did a lot

of the research

on the -- in the local

and just in his community,

the link between Wapato

and Seattle and the Alaska

Cannery Workers Union.

-Terri Mast, a young woman

from the Wallingford

neighborhood in Seattle,

had been a cook at a cannery

and began working

at the newly formed Alaska

Cannery Workers Association,

a legal advocacy group created by the younger Alaskeros,

to challenge the discrimination

against non-whites

in the canneries.

It was at the ACWA that many

social causes banded together

and where Terri met

the dynamic activist Silme.

-Yeah, I was

definitely attracted to Silme

by the political work

and his intellect.

You know, he was kind of

a wild guy back then, too,

but so we all were.

[ Laughs ]

-This generation was coming

of age in a time

when sociopolitical unrest

was happening nationally,

internationally, and locally.

-I was sent to Vietnam,

then came back wounded.

And at the same time, I was sent

to the Fort Leavenworth prison,

and I was facing

a 2 1/2-year sentence.

It was there

where I was in contact

with the ex Black Panther Party.

And so I started

reading about them.

And so that's where

my eyes got opened.

And so when

I came out of prison,

I started going to Seattle

Central Community College,

and that's where

I was introduced

with the Oriental Union

at that time

and began to get involved

with the Asian movement.

-Activists organized rallies

to support community housing,

health services, diversity

in higher education,

fairness in the trades,

and the impending construction

of The Kingdome,

a new sports arena

that would displace residents

and change the face

of the international district,

a mostly Asian-populated neighborhood.

Their efforts resulted

in establishment

of low-income housing,

a health clinic,

a neighborhood

preservation plan,

and equitable hiring practices.

And many of these movements

came together

at the ACWA office

on 8th Avenue South.

-Because there was a lot

going on in the community

at that time --

I mean, there was all kinds

of struggles going on.

Community-based struggles,

civil-rights struggles,

the whole integration

of the building trades,

the women in trades, the --

You know,

the office was, I would say,

kind of a hotbed of people

who were working on

and being active in progressive

political pursuits.

-We were supported by UCWA,

the Construction

Workers Association,

and then, in turn,

we supported other folks.

We formed coalitions

with other Asian groups.

There was support of preserving

the international district.

There was support of

the anti-martial law activities.

-Two months prior

to the Kingdome protests,

Philippine President

Ferdinand Marcos

had declared martial law

on September 21, 1972.

The Union

of Democratic Filipinos,

also known by

its Tagalog acronym, the KDP,

fought against

the Marcos dictatorship

and called for social change

among Filipino-Americans.

-The first time I met

Silme and Gene and Angel,

all these guys -- Terri --

is in the context of

we were establishing

a KDP chapter here in Seattle.

Our commitment was

to organize this community,

this Filipino community here.

So then, of course,

the approach

we took in KDP was

really to get to the --

the particular details

of every Filipino community

we were trying to organize.

So, in Seattle, as soon as you

start that review,

you come up to the canneries

and the Alaska situation.

-The Alaska situation,

though grateful to be employed

each season at the canneries,

the Alaskeros

were experiencing

blatant discrimination

due to race, a status quo

that didn't sit well

with this newly politicized

generation of workers.

-When I was at the cannery,

we basically saw a lot of things

that was quite disturbing,

you know, things that

you wouldn't think happened,

such as a segregated bunkhouse,

segregated jobs.

You're stuck in certain jobs

without any chance of promotion.

And everything was segregated --

your laundry,

your mail, where you live,

the type of food you had.

And the bunkhouse

that held the white workers

had better food.

-When I go to Alaska, I saw the conditions being really bad.

I got called "little brown boy"

right to my face.

I had to sleep in a room

with eight people, you know?

I had to work

20 hours a day, you know?

Relative to growing up

in a school where I was, like,

you know, a wrestling star

or, you know,

like a sports star

or a Scholastic Excel

or something like that.

I mean, you go there, and you're

automatically stepped on.

So, like, I would say

things were bad now.

-This is the -- [ Scoffs ] --

the 1970s.

My God, you know I mean?

It's like --

That's why I meant

It was like a flashback

because you think --

we knew we had

an organizing effort,

and yet there was inequality.

But personally, I was stunned.

I thought --

I expected inequality,

but, you know,

that it would be a little bit

more subtle than this.

This was just, like,

straight out of a book.

-We'd been talking all summer,

'cause the Filipinos

just got rice and meat

and sometimes salmon heads.

No, I mean, we would joke,

but we were kind of serious

that, "God, we're getting scurvy

or something," you know?

For coffee breaks,

us Filipinos were getting

just black coffee

and a little package of cookies

to divide up

a whole crew, you know?

The white crew

had vegetables, sandwiches,

fruits, hot chocolate.

I mean, just a banquet,

table full of stuff.

And we used to tell our foreman,

"How come they get all that

and we don't?"

"That's the way it is,

you know?

Just be content."

And we went to this warehouse,

and it had all this food,

'cause they were

supplying the ships

and supplying

the white man's mess,

and they had, like,

fruit cocktail and peaches.

I mean,

we never saw any of that.

-The Alaskeros

who did the grueling jobs

inside the fish houses

often worked

18 or more hours a day

at dangerous,

repetitive tasks,

barely pausing to eat and sleep.

It was worsened by the terrible

housing conditions and food.

After one particularly hard day,

Gene organized

an impromptu food strike.

We had just worked

a long stretch,

maybe three, four days.

The way Alaska works is,

they have fishing,

and then the authorities

closed down the fisheries

for a few days

to let some salmon through.

So we just worked really --

a real long stretch,

three or four days

at 20 hours a day.

And so we're all really tired.

And they had --

We basically had a day

where we could have a day off,

but we were

still under contract.

And we were saying,

"We want some of that food

we know is there,"

you know?

And they said, "No."

So what they would have us do

on these kind of days,

rather than just let us

relax in our barracks,

they had us --

Imagine a gigantic

warehouse, right?

With these metal for canning.

We'd move the boxes, hundreds of

big cartons full of metal,

from one side of the warehouse

to the other side.

And then, the next day,

we would move it back.

And it was simply because

they didn't want to pay us

without us working.

And so it was kind of

a harassment type thing.

So that's what they were --

And so people

were angry and stuff,

and we said, "You know what?

we're not going

to the warehouse today,

not until we get better

food and stuff."

And Gene became

the spokesperson.

-After that fishing season

in the summer of 1973,

the ACWA filed

three class-action lawsuits

on behalf of Filipino

and non-white workers

in the Alaska canneries.

-I think we were part of

the generation

that at least started

to raise questions

at the company about,

"Why is it like this?"

Because many of our fathers

and uncles and people before us,

they just took the --

they just took the abuse

and they just continued to work

because they had no choice

but to do that.

We felt we had a choice.

And so we started making

some noise about that,

started documenting

a lot of what was going on.

-We need to learn

how to organize.

So I went to Alaska

early on,

freezing my butt off,

actually crying,

said, "What the hell

am I doing here?

It's so cold," right?

And learning

how to organize a union.

-And when I came back,

the younger people in the union

were starting to talk about

doing some sort of documentation

of the discrimination

up in Alaska

to file lawsuits

against the industry.

-The three lawsuits were filed

against the largest canneries

in Alaska,

citing discrimination

under Title VII

of the 1964

Civil Rights Act.

As the lawsuits slowly made

their way through the courts,

ACWA members,

including Silme and Gene,

found themselves blacklisted

from obtaining work

in the canneries.

But they began to enlist others

to help them in the struggle.

-I think it was Gene actually

called me up and said,

"Hey, you know,

we've got this reform movement

in the union, and we thought we'd talk to you about it."

And I had been involved

in anti-war stuff with Vietnam.

And I -- you know,

I wanted to change the world,

make it a better place.

-Part of going there, really,

is to understand

trade unions

and what is it like

to be a member of a union.

What is it like to

file grievance,

what do we mean

by being a shop steward,

how do you negotiate.

Some basic

trade-union mechanics.

-And they also found

an inspiration and model

from the past,

their mano forefathers,

who had fought

these battles decades before.

-Talked about, like,

your organizing experiences

down in California.

And then, like, you know,

I've read

a lot of history of this union,

and that dates -- you know,

it starts off about 1932

when the workers really

put their foot down

and decided that

they were gonna --

they were really gonna start organizing people.

-We Filipinos opened our eyes

to how these white people

are better-conditioned

in the working conditions.

-The local manos

who had the closest ties

to the work of the union,

they really came from

a generation out of

the '30s and '40s and '50s.

And it was really a blessing

to have some of these manos

still around who remembered

and had the literature,

had the pamphlets and leaflets

and had the stories to tell

about where they've come

and what they've done.

-Our purpose, we Filipinos

were to unite together

in order to fight for

a better condition of living.

-Most of those old-timers were

part of the the Communist Party.

And so they had no hesitancy

about talking

about their experiences

and what they went through

to be political activists

and especially

in a multiracial movement

and sometimes

the difficulties of that.

Being able to sit down,

have drinks with them,

and talk about their histories

is really what

influenced me a lot

and gave me

my political insight.

And, really,

that's where I got politicized

was around being around them.

-Though the manos had created

a road map

the activists could follow,

current inequities were not

just created by the canneries.

In the years following the rabid

anti-communist era of the 1950s,

the union ousted its more

radical early reformers.

By the 1960s, the union

had become part of the problem,

its leaders sanctioning bribes

in exchange for jobs in Alaska.

-Something that was

very paramount

to the reform of the union

was to abolish the bribery

and the favoritism

that was so rampant

for all the canneries.

And it really did take a team

to make sure

that everything was --

was correct.

The records were kept

in good order

and that people did get up to Alaska based off of seniority.

-As the second-generation

activist soon found out,

trying to change a broken system

threatened the old guard

who controlled the union

and profited from the bribes.

Change would not come easily.

-There really wasn't a lot of

thinking in our minds

that this is going

to be dangerous.

I mean, we just thought that,

you know,

it's just another

organizing thing,

and we're going to

take things on

and, you know, things are gonna be on our side on this thing,

you know, if we worked hard

and we did our organizing

right as we were trained.

And then I think as our movement

got taken a lot more serious

in the union,

we began to see resistance

occurring on the part

of Tony Baruso,

who was the president

of the union,

and some of his kind

of supporters in the union,

starting to resist our efforts

a little bit more, right?

-Tony Baruso had served

as Local 37's president

for six years.

He had also made a failed run

for the Washington state

legislature in 1970.

As a high-profile

community leader,

he was also a staunch supporter

of President Ferdinand Marcos,

and he kept a photograph

of them shaking hands

in his office.

Many from the community

supported Marcos,

a fellow Ilocos province native

who rose to the highest position

of power in the Philippines.

Marcos' violation of democracy

through martial law

was a divisive point of conflict

within the Seattle

Filipino community.

-When I was growing up,

most of the people,

the Filipinos,

were here pre-World War II.

And there were

post-World War II immigrants,

and they're very different,

especially those who are

from the area

where my father was from,

Ilocos,

where Marcos was from.

-Geographic distance

and hometown allegiances

influenced attitudes towards

the divisive and corrupt

Philippines president.

-Kind of like,

"He's just a nice boy.

You know, he's doing

the right thing,"

because of that

regional connection.

Plus, they hadn't, I think,

lived in the Philippines

for a long time,

even though

they'd go back to visit.

And then you have

the post-World War people that

were seeing what he was doing

to their country,

and they were closely

aligned to it.

Some people were perceived

as supporting Marcos

and were just labeled

as just evil people.

And they're going,

"Wait a minute.

We've been here

for all this time,

and we've built up

the community centers,

and all of this that you guys,

the latecomers, are coming now

and trying to take over.

And because we think we're

loyal, like, Filipino-Americans,

you're attacking us," and these other people are going,

"But you're supporting a man

that's suppressing our country."

-This sharp tension played

into the battles

of the anti-Marcos work,

the lawsuits,

and the union-reform movement.

The young activists were all

but frozen out of the union

by the old-guard

Marcos supporters.

-We realized that it was gonna take more of a movement

within the union

to make it happen.

So we created a --

what we called

the rank-and-file movement,

which was something

that we had looked

at historically

within the union.

There had been,

at one point in time,

another rank-and-file movement.

So we kind of used

that as our model

and talked to some of

the old-timers

about how they did it

and how they created it

and how it was effective

or not effective

and used some lessons from them

and re-created what we called

the rank-and-file movement.

-After several unsuccessful

attempts at election reform

candidates for the

Local 37's executive board,

the young rank-and-file committee members

nearly swept the ballot

in 1980,

with Silme

elected secretary treasurer

and Gene winning

the key position of dispatcher.

Only Baruso remained

from the old leadership.

-And so as we were doing

the organizing

into the reform movement

all the way up

until the ILWU convention

in Hawaii,

we thought nothing

of the real danger of this.

I mean, we're young and brash,

and we had our ideas

about what needs to get done,

so we just went

gangbusters forward,

and we just did

what we needed to do.

-Before attending

the International Longshoremen's

and Warehousemen's Union

convention in Hawaii,

Gene traveled to the Philippines

to meet with family members

and anti-Marcos leaders,

including the Kilusang Mayo Uno,

or KMU, a federation

of anti-Marcos trade unions.

Gene arrived at the convention

determined to get ILWU support

for

the Philippines labor movement.

-You know, the ILWU itself

has a very progressive,

rich history,

and this was probably the only

time that the ILWU

had not taken a position

against a dictator.

And so it was very significant

that Gene brought back

that not only greetings

from the KMU

and that the Local 37

brought this resolution

to the international.

-The vote on the resolution

to send an ILWU team

to the Philippines

to investigate repression

of the labor movement

was initially split due

to opposition from Baruso

and other Marcos supporters.

But it eventually passed,

setting in motion a challenge

against the Marcos dictatorship.

The start of the fishing season

was right

on the heels of the convention.

The young activists

held the keys

to running a fair dispatch,

and Gene was determined

to eliminate

bribes from the process.

Emboldened by their victory

in Hawaii,

Gene and Silme continued their

outspoken opposition to Marcos

despite the growing danger

to their lives.

-When he came --

like, when he came back

from the Philippines,

he was only there --

I had to leave to Alaska

because I went up early,

way earlier

than the cannery crews,

to get things ready,

so I only got to see him

for about a week.

And so he had told me --

'Cause he used

my truck a lot here and there,

and so he'd say,

"If you notice somebody

following you...,"

and I go, "What?"

then he'd say,

"Yeah, just be aware, you know?"

-When Silme actually came to me

and the executive board

and said, "We need

to buy life insurance"...

I was driving Silme's car

because my car had broken down.

I was living on Beacon Hill.

And...

I've noticed that,

going back and forth to school,

there was a car following me.

And I told Silme,

"Somebody's following you,"

and he started laughing.

And nobody believed me, right?

And I was like, "No, there is

somebody following you, Silme."

-But I remember asking him,

"Is this really dangerous?

Do you need to come home?"

And he says, "No, no.

I mean, they're angry,

but they're --"

He thought

he had it under control.

And the feeling was is,

"Yeah, it's dangerous,

but it's worth doing,"

and if not him,

then somebody's

gonna have to do it,

and it's just

as dangerous for them.

-Gene stood fast in his refusal

to take bribes

and allow unfair favoritism.

Tony Dictado,

leader of the Tulisan,

a Filipino street gang

who controlled

gambling in the union,

was enraged because he was

unable to get his gang members

dispatched up to Alaska

for the coming season.

Baruso also grew

increasingly upset

by the actions of Gene, Silme,

and the other young

rank-and-file reformers.

-I think the week before

the murders, Tony Dictado

was sort of a known --

he was a known gangster to us.

He was in the office

talking to Baruso.

They went in

and shut the door.

You could see,

'cause he had a glass door

so you could see him

in there, you know, talking.

So he was around

a lot that last week.

He had made threats against Gene

about the Dillingham dispatch,

and he said

he was going to kill Gene.

I just think we didn't really

think that...

You know, there's a lot of

that kind of bravado,

the talk that sometimes you just

sort of put into a category,

you just kind of go

"That's just, you know,

braggadocio or whatever."

But, yeah,

I think it was shocking.

Didn't think it

would really happen.

-I had gone to work.

I went to pick up the girls

and was driving home,

and the funny thing is,

I almost went by the hall,

and I didn't.

I decided to go home.

So I went home,

and I made dinner,

because we were supposed to have

a meeting that night.

-And so the meeting was set for,

I think, 4:00 or 4:15

or something like that.

Well, I was running late

from work,

and I was caught in traffic.

So I was going down there,

and as I was approaching

the union hall on the right,

there were --

It was cordoned off,

and there were police cars

and fire trucks there.

-Chris was watching the news,

and he says --

and he was as white

as a ghost, he says,

"Something happened

at the union."

He goes, "There's something.

They said that

there's a shooting

at the union," and stuff.

I'm like, "What?"

I go, "No, can't be."

-And I walked up

to the union hall

'cause people were

standing around the union hall,

and I was met by

a police officer

standing outside, saying,

"You can't go in here.

There was a shooting in here."

I said, "Shooting?"

He said, "Yes.

And two people got shot,

and we think it might be

a gang thing,

and one person was

taken to the hospital."

-Gene and Silme

were alone in the union hall

when two men

entered the building.

One pulled a .45-caliber

MAC-10 automatic pistol

with a silencer

and began firing.

Gene was killed instantly.

But Silme survived

despite being shot four times.

He made it out to the alley

behind the union hall

where he was spotted by a cook

from the restaurant

across the street.

An ambulance

transported Silme

to Harborview Medical Center.

-So, I came in,

and I called the hall,

and nobody answered.

And I thought, "Oh, okay.

He's on his way home."

And so I finished dinner,

and, uh...

Then, John Foz called me,

I think.

-We received a phone call --

I forget from who.

It was a phone call that said

that Gene and Silme

had been shot,

and we did not know

their condition.

-And he said,

"Are you at home?"

and I said, "Yeah," and he goes,

"Elaine and I are gonna

come by for a minute."

I was like, "Oh, okay."

I go, "Well, you know,

we're just about to have dinner,

waiting for Silme,

I have a meeting,"

and he's like,

"Well, we just need

to come by for a minute."

I'm like, "Okay."

So, they come in,

and it was John and Elaine

and Shari Woo.

Yeah.

[ Sniffles ]

Yeah, and I opened the door,

and I could just tell --

Shari immediately

took the kids aside,

and I was like...

And then they go,

"Gene and Silme have been shot."

I'm like, "What?"

I mean, it was just so --

I had no...

I don't know what

they were talking about.

And I think they took

the kids somewhere,

and they took me

to the hospital.

-At that point --

[ Sniffles ] --

we went down to pick up my mom,

'cause they said that

Silme and Gene had been shot,

and I thought that they were

gonna be really strong

and that they would be alive,

but we did not know

that Gene had died instantly.

And then, Silme --

We went to pick up my mom,

and she said, "We're going to go

to the hospital."

We actually went to Silme

when he was in surgery.

And we knew that Silme

wasn't going to make it.

He had already had a severe, um...um...

trauma to all

his internal organs,

and we -- he --

they were already doing

their last CPR on him.

But he lasted as long

to at least tell,

you know, Terri and my mom,

you know, who was involved.

-Before he was taken

to the hospital,

Silme was able to identify

the shooters

to the emergency crews

that had arrived on the scene,

Ben Guloy and Jimmy Ramil,

who were both members

of the Tulisan street gang.

-I just couldn't believe it.

I mean, basically,

the friend who called just said

Gene had died

and Silme was in the hospital.

And it was that short.

It was like that.

I was just, uh...

pretty much just devastated.

-Silme went through

three surgeries,

regaining consciousness

a number of times,

but his heart finally stopped

and he died about 24 hours

after he had been shot.

-Well, you know,

this was the first time

that I ever cried in my life

since I left the Philippines.

In the war in Vietnam,

I never cried.

I didn't have

any feelings at all.

I had to cut that off.

But this was different,

because this here was a person

that was --

that was very close to me.

He was like a brother.

And, uh...

And I loved him a lot, you know?

And to lose something

like that,

it just --

kind of just blew me away.

You know?

And I really wanted revenge.

-And one of the decisions

that we had to make was

we had to go back

into the union hall

the next day

to continue that work.

And so that's where we decided

to go in as a team.

So it was Emily, myself,

Alonzo, John Foz, and Terri

decided to go in the next day.

And we went in the next morning.

-What I think affected me most

is how we responded

to the situation.

I didn't think

I would be able to respond

to the murders

without the other people,

because it was very scary.

-I'm not sure if it was scared,

but we just went in there

and we charged

in there and said --

And the blood wasn't even

dried yet.

And, you know,

we're going to take over this.

We're going to continue to work.

-Bottom line is this.

Those are the people who

had to actually go back in

and turn the key

and open up the union

and get ready

for the next dispatch.

Right?

We actually ran a dispatch,

a fair dispatch

while the dispatcher

had just been killed,

you know, so the incredible

heroism on that part.

But I would say that it was

the collective strength

because I often muse

on the fact that, you know,

no one ever sets out

to be a --

real heroes

never set out to be heroes.

You're just trying to do what's

right, and then circumstance

puts something in front of you.

And so ordinary people wind up

doing extraordinary things.

-How do -- you know, how do we do -- do the -- still do --

continue doing the work

in Local 37,

continue do the work of KDP?

And for me,

I was kind of disoriented.

So what do we do?

You know, what's going on?

And if it wasn't for

the organization's leadership

and the determination

to seek justice

by everyone

is what kept us going.

You know,

I know it kept me going.

-Despite their shock

at the murder of their friends

and fears about

their own personal safety,

the rank-and-file committee

members forged

ahead with union reform efforts.

Meanwhile, another group

of activists

and community supporters

focused on seeking justice

for Gene and Silme.

-Committee for Justice

was formed

immediately after the murders.

You know, everyone knew

that this was more

than a random killing

and it was more

than union reform.

-Domingo's younger sister,

who was elected to his union job

after the killing,

believes there may be

a second motive for the murders.

Union reform, but also political

opposition to President Marcos.

-Were they more executions

than random murders

or gang-war violence?

-I think there could be

a possibility.

-I think our goal

is to really find the truth.

You know, who killed

Silme and Gene and why.

And so what we did

is really look at, you know,

the bits and pieces,

you know,

how it happened,

why it happened,

who are the people that we

think, you know, is involved?

-Silme's sister, Cindy Domingo,

became the national chair

of the Committee for Justice

for Domingo and Viernes,

an organization

that led the effort

to link the murders

with perpetrators

that they believed

went far beyond the gunmen.

-We went up against

some incredible power.

One is the, you know,

the power of the gangs.

Nothing to sneeze at,

by the way,

so these were the actual guys

who pulled the trigger

and they were dangerous.

[ Indistinct conversation ]

-The two gunmen,

Jimmy Ramil and Ben Guloy,

were arrested and convicted

of first-degree murder

within four months

of the killings.

-These trials won't bring back

Silme and Gene,

and it's a loss that it's going

to take a long time to get over.

But we're going to continue

finding out

who's responsible

for Silme and Gene's murder,

and it's not going to stop here.

-A few months later,

Tulisan gang leader Tony Dictado

was found guilty of directing the shootings.

The murder weapon

was found discarded

in a public park garbage can.

It was registered to

Tony Baruso.

Baruso was arrested, but he

claimed the gun had been stolen.

When he was called

to the witness stand

at the trials

of Ramil, Guloy, and Dictado,

Baruso refused

to answer questions,

invoking his Fifth Amendment

right

to avoid self-incrimination

140 times.

The Committee for Justice

continue to search for links

to others who might have

ordered the murders,

including Ferdinand Marcos.

-It's significant that when

they went to the convention

that they put a resolution

for an investigation team

to go to the Philippines

and the impact of having

a large organization

like

the International Longshoremen's

and Warehousemen's Union

to investigate

something like that would have,

you know, results

for that country.

-As we went after

the perpetrators,

it got very complex,

and so Baruso had two roles.

One is the kingpin

for the corruption in the union,

and one is the ally

of the Marcos dictatorship.

-Pursuit of Tony Baruso

and Ferdinand Marcos

pressed on for years.

-What got uncovered

in the course

of the justice effort

was that the Marcos government

was in touch with Baruso.

and that Baruso more or less

had been outmaneuvered

by the reform effort.

So, then he has ties

to the Marcos regime,

and they're really mad

at a resolution

on changing something

the union pushed through

at the ILWU convention,

basically in solidarity with

the Filipino workers movement

that was being suppressed

under Marcos.

So that's the confluence

of things that came together,

and that's the thing

that we didn't see coming.

-'Cause eventually the legal

side became the prominent side

when we knew that Baruso

was part of the conspiracy,

and we wanted to file

the civil suits, right, in court

against the Marcos regime

and family.

-That was really their mistake,

that you can't just silence

two men

who were leading the group,

the opposition.

They underestimated the organizing and the collective

that was created

through those years.

-A couple of key people

right on the front lines

said basically to Baruso, "Okay,

now you're really in trouble.

You think you were

in trouble before,

you have not seen anything yet."

-In 1989, after years

of steadfast investigation,

a wrongful death civil suit

against the Marcos regime

went to trial.

Marcos had since fled to Hawaii

after his regime collapsed

in 1986.

He died just months before

the trial commenced.

Evidence showed that a sum

of $15,000

was paid out

from a Marcos-allied slush fund

to Tony Baruso

for a special security project

right before the murders.

Baruso, called to testify,

once again invoked

the fifth amendment 75 times.

-When the case

was, you know, filed,

is that who are we

to file the charges

against President

of the, you know, country,

which it's never been done?

And so I think for us,

it was really just a shock.

I mean, I was shocked,

'cause I like, "Wow."

That actually,

as an American citizen,

you can actually do this.

And I think it was a shock

for the community

that I said it split it up,

because it is like they went --

nobody thought that it can

happen, you know?

And more so

that we really challenged

the President of the Philippines and win.

-On December 15, 1989,

a federal jury

found Ferdinand Marcos

liable for the murders

of Gene Viernes

and Silme Domingo.

-And it's still a precedent

in law schools.

So when you go to law school,

they use this case,

say, "Here's a case

where a foreign government

was held liable

for the murder of U.S. citizens.

-Armed with the evidence

of the $15,000 payment,

Tony Baruso was charged with

murder and brought to trial.

He was convicted

on March 8, 1991,

almost 10 years after Silme

and Gene were murdered.

Given a life sentence without

the possibility of parole,

Baruso died in prison

at the age of 80 in 2008.

1991 proved to be

a significant year.

Not only was Baruso

finally brought to justice,

but Congress passed

the Civil Rights Act of 1991

to strengthen and improve

federal civil-rights laws

and to provide for damages

in cases of intentional

employment discrimination.

This act was a response

to a Supreme Court ruling

which invalidated the last

of the ACWA

class action lawsuits

that were initiated

in the 1970s.

In a strike

against the supporters

of the civil-rights bill,

Senator Frank Murkowski

of Alaska amended it

to exempt specifically

the Ward's Cove Cannery,

which had been named

in the original lawsuits.

It was a blow to a legal effort

that had lasted 27 years.

-Naturally, I'm disappointed

in the outcome

of the Ward's Cove case.

I think anyone in my shoes

would be.

It was a time when the whole civil-rights area was changing,

and that was sort of certainly

part of the explanation

for how things came out.

Legacy of the lawsuits

was initially

to make people aware

that there were laws prohibiting

a lot of the discrimination

that people could see

and maybe shift

people's attitudes a little bit

so that they didn't simply

see and comment on

and accept the discrimination,

but tried to do something

about it.

-Many of the canneries that had

been accused of discrimination

had gone out of business

by the time the class action lawsuits were finally settled.

But the efforts of Gene, Silme,

and others

had paid off nonetheless.

-Having experienced

a little bit of what they saw,

'cause it was starting

to get better, it was changing,

but it was still there

to some extent.

But you could tell

that it was changing,

and I still could see

some of the problems

that were there,

and I got to see it change,

so I knew what they were doing

was working.

-You know, after all

of that work they did,

if you were still going

to Alaska,

you could see the difference in

the treatment we were getting,

the housing, the food.

I mean, things actually changed.

-The period after the murders

was a changing time

for the salmon-canning industry

and the Local 37.

The second-generation activists

had reformed the union

and began steering it

in a democratic,

progressive direction.

But by then, the industry

had switched from canning

to fresh-frozen processing.

With jobs beginning to vanish,

the union decided to sell

the building

that they had owned since 1947

and where Gene

and Silme were murdered.

They merged to become Region 37

within

the Inlandboatmen's Union,

the marine division of the ILWU.

Terri Mast was elected

the national secretary/treasurer of the IBU,

a position

she still holds today.

-For me, it's still being part

of a movement.

I think the labor movement

is kind of the only hope

for the working class

in this country.

So I enjoy doing that.

And I think

it's personally rewarding to me,

and, you know,

I think at this point,

I also bring something

to the table.

Thank you.

And I'm Terri Mast,

the national secretary/treasurer

of the Inlandboatmen's Union.

[ Cheers and applause ]

It's been over 30 years since

Gene and Silme were murdered,

and their friends and allies continue to reflect on

and celebrate

their lives and influence.

The legacy of Gene and Silme

runs deep.

Solidarity forever

For the union

makes us strong

[ Cheers and applause ]

-Well, I think their legacy,

one, was that

they did bridge the gap.

They did bridge the history

from before to present

and kept it going.

You know,

they kept that movement

that was started back then, brought it to present,

and we've kept it going.

So I think that's one.

I think the other is that

they did create change

in the industry.

-Who knows what would have

happened without these murders.

I mean, if these murders

and the reform of the union

had not happened,

it's hard to say where the Cannery Workers Union would be.

It's hard to say where both

the ILWU and the IBU would be,

to be honest,

because it injected

in some sense

and enlivened a whole sort

of international view

of the labor movement in a way

that, you know,

it took their blood.

-For me now,

that actually still operates,

that collectively,

if you put things together,

we can work things out,

and we can make change.

You know, change is about

disliking

your current condition,

having a vision,

taking the first step, and overcoming resistance, right?

So all those things

somewhat, I think, for me

is the legacy of what Gene

and Silme represent.

Not a day

I don't think about this, too.

I just think about

what they'd be doing right now,

what they would think about

the world we live in.

-[ Sniffles ]

Well, like I say,

he was my role model,

my beacon in life, you know,

that I was just so proud of him.

Sorry.

-With both those guys,

I mean, they lived life,

I think,

as far as to the fullest.

They never looked back,

and they really, both of them,

they had one thing

in common with them.

They always gave.

They never looked

to take anything from anybody.

It was always something

that they would --

I hate to use

the old, common cliché,

but they'd give you

the shirt off their back.

-Gene's memory is...

like, he throws a big shadow.

It's like a curse, right?

I kind of think sometimes he was

killed when we were 29.

When you're a young man,

you have the energy,

and you're strong,

and you're committed.

And when you're an old man

[chuckles]

sometimes you just want to sit

on the couch, you know,

and you don't want to fight

with them, and you don't win.

But the standard is there.

And so I think, you know,

what do I do, you know?

Do I not believe who we were, who we are?

-Silme and Gene

have not been forgotten.

Their lives, work, and sacrifice

continue to inspire

the next generation.

-After my first year of college,

I went to the AFL-CIO

three day Organizing Institute

and, you know,

started getting trained

to be a union organizer

at 18 years old.

Through that process, I sort of started understanding my life

and my experiences

and understanding what

my parents' lives were about

and what their work was about.

And, you know, I think

I was just really instilled

with this idea about needing to do work that changed the world.

-There's a part of me

that is from Wapato,

born and raised here, that the

outside world is kind of scary.

And then when I get into

the outside world,

like, I'm a proponent for --

I feel like

I'm kind of a proponent

for speaking the truth.

And I think what Uncle Gene

has inspired in me

is to always seek the truth.

Don't necessarily need

to convince other people

of the truth,

but always

look deeply at issues,

find out what is my truth

in these issues,

and move towards that truth.

I think that's what

he's inspired in me.

-What I remember

mostly about them

doesn't have to do with politics

or the lawsuits.

It has to do with

there are certain people

that are just your friends.

I would have trusted

either one of those people

with my life.