--> Display at 00:00:00:26

--> Display at 00:00:01:10

--> Display at 00:00:08:23

--> Display at 00:00:16:05

-Welcome to "Seattle Voices."

I'm Eric Liu.

--> Display at 00:00:18:09

I'm delighted to have as

my guest today Rahwa Habte.

--> Display at 00:00:21:05

She's the co-founder of Hidmo.

--> Display at 00:00:22:21

And Rahwa, welcome.

--> Display at 00:00:24:11

-Thank you for having me, Eric.

--> Display at 00:00:26:20

-Lots of people know Hidmo

--> Display at 00:00:29:05

as a space

and a place and a phenomenon.

--> Display at 00:00:31:14

But will you tell our viewers

who don't know it

--> Display at 00:00:34:11

what it is

and what it's all about?

--> Display at 00:00:36:21

-Sure. Well, my sister

and I in 2006

--> Display at 00:00:40:04

decided to take over

this little restaurant

--> Display at 00:00:42:19

and lounge

in the Central District

--> Display at 00:00:44:03

on the corner

of 20th and Jackson.

--> Display at 00:00:46:09

And our idea was --

You know, we're Eritrean.

--> Display at 00:00:49:09

Our idea was this is a great way

--> Display at 00:00:51:19

to share our culture,

own a business,

--> Display at 00:00:54:26

be entrepreneurs

in a neighborhood

--> Display at 00:00:58:08

that was very significant

to us -- the Central District --

--> Display at 00:01:01:12

and also allow a space

in a neighborhood

--> Display at 00:01:05:10

that was important to us

--> Display at 00:01:06:24

for activity to happen,

--> Display at 00:01:10:12

for people to come, gather.

--> Display at 00:01:12:23

We sort of imagined

it as a community hub,

--> Display at 00:01:15:28

but we didn't know what that

was going to look like.

--> Display at 00:01:19:23

We thought people would just

feel comfortable, come in,

--> Display at 00:01:21:18

grabbing a bite, checking in.

--> Display at 00:01:23:15

You know,

just a little, cool business

--> Display at 00:01:26:23

that the people can come and

do things in, have meetings in.

--> Display at 00:01:30:02

And that idea just exploded

into...

--> Display at 00:01:35:04

At the time, I was involved

--> Display at 00:01:39:01

I would say heavily

in the music scene here

--> Display at 00:01:42:04

with a few specific artists,

--> Display at 00:01:46:16

producing shows

and helping out with,

--> Display at 00:01:49:10

you know, marketing the things

that they were working on.

--> Display at 00:01:52:27

We were both involved

in our Eritrea community,

--> Display at 00:01:56:04

doing youth work

and doing women's groups.

--> Display at 00:01:58:10

We'd both had a history of working at --

--> Display at 00:02:00:17

Actually, at the time,

we were both working

--> Display at 00:02:02:00

at a women's shelter.

--> Display at 00:02:03:20

You know, we were involved

in all these different things.

--> Display at 00:02:06:26

And so...

--> Display at 00:02:09:16

When we started spending

all of our time in Hidmo,

--> Display at 00:02:12:28

all of those worlds

kind of followed us there.

--> Display at 00:02:15:08

So, the artists that I was working with at the time

--> Display at 00:02:18:17

would come and meet there

--> Display at 00:02:20:07

and would ask

if they could do a show there

--> Display at 00:02:23:04

or have a meeting there

or, you know, whatever.

--> Display at 00:02:27:07

The youth that I was working

with would come

--> Display at 00:02:29:02

and do homework there

or come ask...

--> Display at 00:02:30:28

We had Wi-Fi.

--> Display at 00:02:32:13

...and would come and use our computers

--> Display at 00:02:34:09

to do different things.

"I have a project due tomorrow.

--> Display at 00:02:37:01

Can I..."

You know.

--> Display at 00:02:39:20

And just being a space

that was...

--> Display at 00:02:41:23

We didn't run it like a traditional space

--> Display at 00:02:43:24

just to have people see people,

have them order their food,

--> Display at 00:02:46:24

get their food,

and get them out.

--> Display at 00:02:48:03

You're supposed to turn tables over, this and that.

--> Display at 00:02:50:05

You know, there's lots of space,

and it did become a place

--> Display at 00:02:53:17

where people came and hung out

--> Display at 00:02:55:01

and just kind of shared,

checked in.

--> Display at 00:02:56:29

And...yeah.

--> Display at 00:02:58:16

And then in a very short

amount of time,

--> Display at 00:03:01:18

we just started getting known

--> Display at 00:03:04:28

for the incredible music

that happened there.

--> Display at 00:03:06:23

'Cause then as more and more

artists started utilizing it,

--> Display at 00:03:09:28

regular shows

started happening --

--> Display at 00:03:11:22

monthly showcases,

weekly showcases,

--> Display at 00:03:14:23

some of them that we helped

to produce and promote,

--> Display at 00:03:18:05

and a lot of them that were

just ideas that other people had

--> Display at 00:03:23:11

that didn't have another place

that they could have it.

--> Display at 00:03:26:26

Would say, "Hey, can I do a monthly open mic here?

--> Display at 00:03:30:03

Can I do all women's, you know,

showcase here?

--> Display at 00:03:33:05

Can I do this?"

-Meanwhile, there still was

--> Display at 00:03:35:00

a restaurant going on, right?

-Yeah, there's a restaurant.

--> Display at 00:03:37:02

There's a bar, you know.

Yeah.

--> Display at 00:03:38:19

And that was why

we were so busy doing that.

--> Display at 00:03:41:16

We were happy to have people

come in and do their events

--> Display at 00:03:43:09

'cause, you know,

I was used to producing events

--> Display at 00:03:46:19

and doing shows and doing this.

--> Display at 00:03:48:05

I didn't have time

to do any of that

--> Display at 00:03:49:18

because I was trying

to run a business.

--> Display at 00:03:52:02

And so, when people came

and wanted to do shows,

--> Display at 00:03:54:28

I was like,

yeah, that would be great.

--> Display at 00:03:56:20

And it was a also time for me

to kind of enjoy,

--> Display at 00:04:00:03

you know, the music and the art

and the stuff that I like.

--> Display at 00:04:02:20

When it was at my restaurant,

I didn't have to leave.

--> Display at 00:04:05:10

-It sounds so incredibly organic

how it happened.

--> Display at 00:04:08:09

Looking back, how much of this

would you say

--> Display at 00:04:10:10

you intended to happen

--> Display at 00:04:12:10

and how much of it was really

just people followed you

--> Display at 00:04:15:11

and things happened sort of

one after the next?

--> Display at 00:04:20:07

-I would say...

--> Display at 00:04:22:17

You know, you ima-- It's kind

of that thing where, yes,

--> Display at 00:04:25:26

I completely intended

for it to happen, you know.

--> Display at 00:04:28:06

It's kind of

my wildest dreams coming true.

--> Display at 00:04:30:25

I was open to it,

and I wanted it to happen,

--> Display at 00:04:33:26

but I didn't have a plan

of how it was going to happen,

--> Display at 00:04:37:19

but that me wanting it

to happen and, you know,

--> Display at 00:04:40:24

and allowing people

to just kind of...

--> Display at 00:04:44:11

allowing people to do programing

there made it happen.

--> Display at 00:04:48:04

So, it wasn't intentional

in that we said,

--> Display at 00:04:50:01

"In the first year,

we're gonna do this many shows

--> Display at 00:04:52:00

and partner with this many non-profits

--> Display at 00:04:53:13

and have this many --"

--> Display at 00:04:54:22

We didn't intend it in that way,

--> Display at 00:04:56:23

but it was our intention

to run a community,

--> Display at 00:04:59:16

have a community space that was

hopefully like a vibrant space

--> Display at 00:05:03:21

that lots of people could

utilize for different things.

--> Display at 00:05:06:12

And we did want because

we loved art and music

--> Display at 00:05:08:27

and because we love

the neighborhood

--> Display at 00:05:10:16

and because we loved working

with youth and different things,

--> Display at 00:05:13:16

we you know...

It was intentional in that way,

--> Display at 00:05:16:18

but it wasn't planned by us

at all.

--> Display at 00:05:18:19

-When you think back now

over the evolution

--> Display at 00:05:21:11

of this this cultural center,

--> Display at 00:05:25:00

what do you feel

like you've learned

--> Display at 00:05:26:29

about how to create a space,

how to create community?

--> Display at 00:05:30:25

I mean, if you were now to --

and we'll talk in a moment

--> Display at 00:05:33:05

about how Hidmo

is moving to a new space.

--> Display at 00:05:36:27

But if you were doing something

like in a whole other city

--> Display at 00:05:39:10

without any background,

what lessons have you learned

--> Display at 00:05:42:12

about how to foster community

in a space?

--> Display at 00:05:46:21

--> Erase at 00:05:48:02

-I've learned that....

--> Display at 00:05:50:12

...you know...

--> Display at 00:05:52:17

just to kind of trust

your intuition,

--> Display at 00:05:55:11

trust your gut on things,

first and foremost,

--> Display at 00:05:58:04

and also just, you know,

--> Display at 00:06:00:10

trust other people also --

--> Display at 00:06:02:18

that other people know

what's right for them

--> Display at 00:06:04:26

and who they are

and what's good for them.

--> Display at 00:06:06:16

Trust other people's expertise.

--> Display at 00:06:08:22

And I j--

What I mean to say

--> Display at 00:06:11:18

is trust that you don't know

everything 'cause we had --

--> Display at 00:06:15:18

Some of the things that we had even planned

--> Display at 00:06:17:17

because my sister

and I were uncomfortable

--> Display at 00:06:19:01

running a bar at the beginning.

I mean, we were like --

--> Display at 00:06:21:10

You know,

we had our liquor license.

--> Display at 00:06:22:19

Everything was legit.

We're like, "We don't know

--> Display at 00:06:24:12

about this whole bar thing."

--> Display at 00:06:26:22

We learned that spaces

have lives of their own.

--> Display at 00:06:31:10

You know, there are certain

things that you can control

--> Display at 00:06:34:10

and there are other things

that you can't control.

--> Display at 00:06:37:15

And even though you don't have

complete control,

--> Display at 00:06:39:29

it doesn't mean

that it's a bad thing.

--> Display at 00:06:41:23

I don't know I'm doing

a bad job of creating it.

--> Display at 00:06:43:22

But going into Hidmo, you know,

there were people

--> Display at 00:06:46:03

that the space

already meant something to --

--> Display at 00:06:49:05

you know, that the neighborhood,

that those streets

--> Display at 00:06:50:28

meant different things to different people.

--> Display at 00:06:53:12

And coming into it, it had

a specific meaning for us.

--> Display at 00:06:57:20

But recognizing

that the same space,

--> Display at 00:07:00:07

the same street,

the same whatever

--> Display at 00:07:02:26

can have drastically

different meanings,

--> Display at 00:07:06:02

can mean very different things

to different people

--> Display at 00:07:08:09

and to trust that this might be

the way I see it,

--> Display at 00:07:11:12

but other people have

a different vision of it.

--> Display at 00:07:13:18

And it's just kind of

getting to know people

--> Display at 00:07:16:27

and building trust

with each other.

--> Display at 00:07:18:24

-When do you feel like you

learn that?

--> Display at 00:07:20:08

'Cause that's a hard thing

to do as an entrepreneur, right?

--> Display at 00:07:22:27

I mean,

when you're starting a business,

--> Display at 00:07:25:13

a lot of things you're trying

to actually control

--> Display at 00:07:28:24

or at least, you know, plan,

you know...

--> Display at 00:07:31:10

-Yeah.

-...down to the Nth degree.

--> Display at 00:07:33:22

And you're talking about

really this --

--> Display at 00:07:35:22

again, this idea of faith

and trust that people

--> Display at 00:07:38:06

will find the right way

to engage the space.

--> Display at 00:07:42:09

Was that a matter

of temperament

--> Display at 00:07:43:18

or had there been

past experiences for you

--> Display at 00:07:45:25

in the music business

or otherwise

--> Display at 00:07:47:17

that that gave you

that sense of trust?

--> Display at 00:07:49:27

-I think it's just all about

personal connection.

--> Display at 00:07:52:20

It really is.

It's about getting to know

--> Display at 00:07:54:24

a person and saying okay.

--> Display at 00:07:56:21

I'm, you know, just establishing

--> Display at 00:07:59:12

a relationship with somebody

--> Display at 00:08:02:21

and just getting to know them

on a completely different level.

--> Display at 00:08:06:29

And, you know...

Yeah, that's it.

--> Display at 00:08:09:16

You know, just getting to know people.

--> Display at 00:08:12:14

-As you've...

Okay, so let's talk about

--> Display at 00:08:15:10

how Hidmo's entering

a next phase now.

--> Display at 00:08:19:09

Tell us what's happening

as we sit here in 2011.

--> Display at 00:08:23:22

You all are making a transition.

--> Display at 00:08:25:11

-Yeah.

So, at the end of December,

--> Display at 00:08:26:29

we decided to close the space

on 20th and Jackson,

--> Display at 00:08:30:21

which everybody was incredibly sad about

--> Display at 00:08:32:08

because so much community

and so many memories

--> Display at 00:08:34:06

had been created there

and some incredible energy

--> Display at 00:08:36:03

had been built there.

--> Display at 00:08:38:04

We had an opportunity

last year --

--> Display at 00:08:39:28

There's another incredible space

--> Display at 00:08:43:08

that is going through

a renovation of its own.

--> Display at 00:08:47:19

It's a space called

Washington Hall.

--> Display at 00:08:50:05

It's on 14th and Fir,

--> Display at 00:08:52:26

and it's a historic venue.

It's over 100 years old now.

--> Display at 00:08:55:28

It's also, over time,

--> Display at 00:08:59:13

has been this hub

of community activity.

--> Display at 00:09:02:06

Jimi Hendrix played in his

first high school band there,

--> Display at 00:09:05:04

Billie Holiday has performed

there before,

--> Display at 00:09:08:21

tons of cultural and political,

--> Display at 00:09:12:11

you know,

groups have called it home.

--> Display at 00:09:15:27

It was a boarding house

for a little time

--> Display at 00:09:18:07

for I think the Dutch community.

--> Display at 00:09:20:11

It was run by the Sons of Haiti,

for another.

--> Display at 00:09:23:11

It was a church.

Just this space

--> Display at 00:09:26:02

with incredible energy.

--> Display at 00:09:27:24

Lately, it's fallen

into the past --

--> Display at 00:09:29:10

Over the past couple of decades,

it's fallen into disrepair.

--> Display at 00:09:33:13

And so, 4Culture

and Historic Seattle --

--> Display at 00:09:35:23

Historic Seattle with the help of 4Culture

--> Display at 00:09:37:14

had purchased the building.

--> Display at 00:09:39:00

And what they knew

they wanted to do

--> Display at 00:09:40:18

was preserve it

and fix it up physically.

--> Display at 00:09:44:24

But another thing that I think

both institutions understood

--> Display at 00:09:48:21

is that, you know,

--> Display at 00:09:50:07

they wanted it

to be filled with community.

--> Display at 00:09:53:15

They wanted it

to be vibrant again.

--> Display at 00:09:56:19

And so they went through

a process where they selected

--> Display at 00:09:59:18

a few "anchor tenants"

in Hidmo,

--> Display at 00:10:02:19

and we went through the whole

process of getting to know them

--> Display at 00:10:05:04

and them getting to know us.

--> Display at 00:10:06:16

And they decided that Hidmo

would be a good fit

--> Display at 00:10:08:24

to be housed in this space.

--> Display at 00:10:10:14

And so right now, we're in

the process of transitioning

--> Display at 00:10:13:20

from the old space

--> Display at 00:10:14:27

into the new space

in Washington Hall.

--> Display at 00:10:17:18

-And so, as you do that,

there's obviously

--> Display at 00:10:19:25

a lot of logistical things

to worry about --

--> Display at 00:10:22:13

what the new space

is gonna look like

--> Display at 00:10:24:03

and how it works and everything.

--> Display at 00:10:25:17

What about,

as you were saying,

--> Display at 00:10:26:28

the relationship side of that?

--> Display at 00:10:28:07

Do you feel like

that will seamlessly flow

--> Display at 00:10:30:17

from one space to another

--> Display at 00:10:32:17

because it's just about

this network of relationships

--> Display at 00:10:35:02

and it could go anywhere?

--> Display at 00:10:36:18

-Yeah. I know.

--> Display at 00:10:37:23

That's the big risk

that you take, right?

--> Display at 00:10:39:09

That's a big risk

that we have taken now

--> Display at 00:10:41:01

in trying to move our community

--> Display at 00:10:43:10

and the energy

into this new space.

--> Display at 00:10:45:15

But we are

taking it very slowly.

--> Display at 00:10:47:02

We're being very intentional.

--> Display at 00:10:48:08

We're doing intercommunity work.

--> Display at 00:10:50:25

So, you know,

touching base with each other

--> Display at 00:10:53:00

about what made Hidmo special.

--> Display at 00:10:56:05

What was it about that space?

--> Display at 00:10:58:06

What was it about the community

--> Display at 00:10:59:28

that we built there

that was good?

--> Display at 00:11:02:27

And what part of that

can transfer.

--> Display at 00:11:05:07

We're not moving forward.

We're not doing any programing,

--> Display at 00:11:07:20

anything until we hear

from the community.

--> Display at 00:11:09:22

So there's been

a transition team

--> Display at 00:11:11:03

that's been meeting

for the past couple of months.

--> Display at 00:11:13:26

And this Tuesday, actually,

tomorrow,

--> Display at 00:11:15:22

we are gonna have our first

community meeting at the hall

--> Display at 00:11:19:24

where we're gonna give an update

--> Display at 00:11:21:21

on what we've been doing

--> Display at 00:11:23:13

and some of the immediate plans.

--> Display at 00:11:27:11

We want to hear from people --

you know,

--> Display at 00:11:29:25

what they want to see

--> Display at 00:11:31:16

and how they want

to utilize the new space

--> Display at 00:11:34:05

and the ways that

the community needs support.

--> Display at 00:11:36:16

-So, in the old space,

when you open the doors

--> Display at 00:11:39:14

and you had your friends

in the music scene coming in

--> Display at 00:11:42:15

and you had the young people

who you've been working with

--> Display at 00:11:44:19

coming in, doing their homework

and you had others

--> Display at 00:11:46:27

from the neighborhood

coming in...

--> Display at 00:11:49:14

Again, how actively

did you try --

--> Display at 00:11:52:17

you and your sister try

to actually stir the pot

--> Display at 00:11:55:18

and get these people

to actively engage one another?

--> Display at 00:11:58:21

Or was that another matter

of just letting it happen

--> Display at 00:12:01:02

and seeing if new connections

would form among them?

--> Display at 00:12:04:27

-Yeah, new connections

definitely did form.

--> Display at 00:12:08:07

So, we're involved

in all these different things.

--> Display at 00:12:10:00

And also, you know, there's

lots of different activists,

--> Display at 00:12:12:02

lots of different community

groups, advocacy organizations,

--> Display at 00:12:14:29

civic, you know, whatever.

--> Display at 00:12:16:12

Just all types --

folks that are super political.

--> Display at 00:12:19:00

Because it is a public space,

it's a restaurant,

--> Display at 00:12:22:01

and people are coming there

for something

--> Display at 00:12:23:19

that everybody needs to do --

eat, you know --

--> Display at 00:12:26:00

or, you know, they just need

a space to meet

--> Display at 00:12:27:29

on days that "programing"

wasn't happening,

--> Display at 00:12:29:23

that we weren't having

an open mic or a specific event.

--> Display at 00:12:32:27

You know, you'd have one table

where the NAACP is meeting.

--> Display at 00:12:36:01

We would have another table

you'd have Youth Speaks,

--> Display at 00:12:38:12

which, you know, was a youth

spoken word organization

--> Display at 00:12:43:11

that was meeting over here.

--> Display at 00:12:45:15

You would have, you know,

--> Display at 00:12:47:19

[indistinct],

a Filipino organization,

--> Display at 00:12:49:27

a women's group

that's meeting over here.

--> Display at 00:12:51:18

And so, when you have people

that are just

--> Display at 00:12:53:02

within a table of each other

--> Display at 00:12:54:25

doing different things

and all at the same time,

--> Display at 00:12:57:02

a lot of things

just happened organically

--> Display at 00:12:59:19

because, you know,

the space was there

--> Display at 00:13:02:15

and because lots of different

people -- again,

--> Display at 00:13:04:18

lots of different people called

it home for different reasons.

--> Display at 00:13:07:17

There's so many connections

that were made there

--> Display at 00:13:09:11

that probably would not

have happened otherwise.

--> Display at 00:13:12:22

And so, we weren't, again,

intentionally doing that,

--> Display at 00:13:16:17

but we were intentionally

opening the space up

--> Display at 00:13:19:09

and not "purposely"

but not, you know --

--> Display at 00:13:22:06

We told people

to be flexible with the space.

--> Display at 00:13:25:09

So, you know,

somebody was, you know,

--> Display at 00:13:27:22

--> Erase at 00:13:29:17

"We want a meeting

with 14 people."

--> Display at 00:13:31:14

You know, I don't know how other people run their business,

--> Display at 00:13:33:29

but we didn't say, "Okay, how much food are you gonna buy?

--> Display at 00:13:36:17

And, you know,

what's gonna happen?

--> Display at 00:13:38:00

You know, we allowed them

use the space for free.

--> Display at 00:13:41:04

And then if another group said,

"Okay,

--> Display at 00:13:42:29

we have a 10-person meeting

that we want to have,"

--> Display at 00:13:46:04

we'd say, "Okay,

you can come to."

--> Display at 00:13:49:07

We allowed the space to be flexible.

--> Display at 00:13:50:14

We moved chairs around,

and people were patient.

--> Display at 00:13:52:24

People like liked that.

Constantly --

--> Display at 00:13:55:03

look different all the time.

There's always different

--> Display at 00:13:56:24

people meeting in there.

There's always

--> Display at 00:13:58:20

different things happening.

And so that flexibility

--> Display at 00:14:01:01

sort of allowed that to happen.

--> Display at 00:14:02:13

-Will the new Hidmo also still

be restaurant bar

--> Display at 00:14:06:07

in addition to the civic hub

and performance space.

--> Display at 00:14:09:14

-The new space will

have a café,

--> Display at 00:14:11:21

it won't be

a full restaurant.

--> Display at 00:14:12:25

Again, there's still

this long process.

--> Display at 00:14:14:17

What can we do to the building?

--> Display at 00:14:16:02

Because it needs

to be preserved.

--> Display at 00:14:18:12

And so there are certain things

--> Display at 00:14:19:28

that we can't physically alter

the building in certain ways.

--> Display at 00:14:23:09

There definitely will be

a public space,

--> Display at 00:14:26:01

whether it be a restaurant

or a deli or a café.

--> Display at 00:14:28:15

Right at this point by summer,

--> Display at 00:14:30:09

there should be

a café open there

--> Display at 00:14:32:20

and then in the future,

after renovation,

--> Display at 00:14:34:07

we'll see what

that can turn into.

--> Display at 00:14:36:04

But again, we still are

promoting, you know,

--> Display at 00:14:39:12

besides things just happening

at Washington Hall,

--> Display at 00:14:42:08

we are going to promote there.

--> Display at 00:14:44:17

One thing that Hidmo showed

is that there is a need

--> Display at 00:14:47:00

for these kinds of spaces.

--> Display at 00:14:48:25

And so there are tons

of, you know,

--> Display at 00:14:50:15

one of our community members

branched off

--> Display at 00:14:53:27

and now he owns a café

in the Central District

--> Display at 00:14:56:18

called Cortona Cafe.

--> Display at 00:14:58:00

And so we've been having our steering committee meetings

--> Display at 00:15:00:08

there and supporting him

and his business.

--> Display at 00:15:01:29

-On Union and 26th?

-Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

--> Display at 00:15:04:06

And so there are other people

that are community minded

--> Display at 00:15:08:02

that want, you know --

we don't have the, you know,

--> Display at 00:15:11:25

we don't have the...

-Monopoly on this?

--> Display at 00:15:13:20

-Yeah, a monopoly on community.

--> Display at 00:15:14:22

We don't have

the monopoly on that.

--> Display at 00:15:15:29

Hidmo is fantastic

and we're secure in our identity

--> Display at 00:15:18:22

and, you know,

the things that we're doing.

--> Display at 00:15:20:06

But if there is no need for Hidmo to exist any longer,

--> Display at 00:15:24:01

we'd be fine, you know,

supporting other people

--> Display at 00:15:26:24

in their vision

and their business.

--> Display at 00:15:28:08

But as long as people do need

space and do need support

--> Display at 00:15:31:23

and, you know,

there are these communities

--> Display at 00:15:33:27

that are kind of homeless,

in need, you know,

--> Display at 00:15:37:00

and need someone to just open

their doors and say,

--> Display at 00:15:38:25

"Come on in.

You can -- You know,

--> Display at 00:15:40:25

you're welcome to be here,"

then we will exist.

--> Display at 00:15:43:04

-I want to pivot to your own path to this work.

--> Display at 00:15:46:22

You were --

--> Display at 00:15:49:12

Tell me your whole --

working backwards from this,

--> Display at 00:15:52:14

so when you and your sister

started Hidmo,

--> Display at 00:15:56:24

you said you were both working

at a women's shelter.

--> Display at 00:15:58:28

-Shelter, yeah. Mm-hmm.

--> Display at 00:16:00:03

-How did you come to that?

--> Display at 00:16:01:18

And how had you decided

in the first place

--> Display at 00:16:04:18

that doing work in service

like this

--> Display at 00:16:06:28

was going to be

meaningful to you?

--> Display at 00:16:08:14

-Well, my parents, again,

we immigrated -- we came here

--> Display at 00:16:11:07

as refugees in 1983

from Eritrea --

--> Display at 00:16:13:28

[ Clears throat ]

Excuse me. --

--> Display at 00:16:15:10

In East Africa.

And so when we came here,

--> Display at 00:16:18:17

there were not a lot

of Eritrean families here.

--> Display at 00:16:21:10

There were only a few.

And we were --

--> Display at 00:16:22:21

-How old were you at the time?

-I was five.

--> Display at 00:16:24:24

I was five.

And so it's me,

--> Display at 00:16:26:21

my six brothers

and sisters at the time.

--> Display at 00:16:29:07

My little brother, Temesgen,

was born here

--> Display at 00:16:30:29

in our first year here in America, and my parents.

--> Display at 00:16:33:26

So there was a bunch of us,

but we were kind of all we had.

--> Display at 00:16:37:14

And as Eritrean

families started coming,

--> Display at 00:16:39:16

we were sort of resettled

in the same area

--> Display at 00:16:42:09

in Mt. Baker on MLK

and McClellan,

--> Display at 00:16:44:18

the apartment complex up

there still exists.

--> Display at 00:16:46:25

So as us and other kind of refugee families that lived

--> Display at 00:16:49:27

in these, um,

--> Display at 00:16:51:12

and so we, you know,

not knowing the language,

--> Display at 00:16:53:17

we had to kind of

just do for ourselves.

--> Display at 00:16:57:20

And so right away, you know,

--> Display at 00:16:59:17

Eritrean parents would

get together,

--> Display at 00:17:01:00

we'd all get together

and do things.

--> Display at 00:17:03:06

And as time went,

other families came.

--> Display at 00:17:04:25

But we, being one

of the first families,

--> Display at 00:17:06:14

were always kind of

who everyone looked to.

--> Display at 00:17:09:05

And my dad is also a natural

--> Display at 00:17:10:29

just kind of leader

in the community.

--> Display at 00:17:12:26

And so they would always

look to us to do programing,

--> Display at 00:17:16:07

you know, help people

fill out paperwork,

--> Display at 00:17:18:04

you know,

start sports teams

--> Display at 00:17:21:01

or social groups

and things like that.

--> Display at 00:17:22:20

We were always the ones

that people looked to.

--> Display at 00:17:24:24

And we ended up founding

a church and a community center

--> Display at 00:17:28:08

that still exists on

24th and Spruce,

--> Display at 00:17:29:26

the Eritrean community center

there was founded

--> Display at 00:17:32:16

during those early years.

--> Display at 00:17:34:02

And so there we did everything,

everything.

--> Display at 00:17:38:10

And again, it was very insular

--> Display at 00:17:39:18

just within

the Eritrean community.

--> Display at 00:17:41:10

When I left for college, it was

my first time away from home

--> Display at 00:17:43:23

and I went to college

in Eastern Washington.

--> Display at 00:17:45:09

Not too far but just far enough

away where it was kind of like,

--> Display at 00:17:48:26

"Oh, okay."

--> Display at 00:17:49:27

I was used to doing

so much every day

--> Display at 00:17:52:15

that, you know, all

I had studying to do.

--> Display at 00:17:55:18

I never had that much freedom

and time before.

--> Display at 00:17:58:14

And so I just had the

natural inclination to organize.

--> Display at 00:18:02:21

I didn't know

it was called organizing.

--> Display at 00:18:04:16

I didn't know it was called,

you know, service or whatever.

--> Display at 00:18:07:06

I'd say, "Oh,

there's a need here.

--> Display at 00:18:09:04

And I kind of know

how to do this.

--> Display at 00:18:10:26

Oh, this program."

--> Display at 00:18:12:04

And so I just started

coming up with programing

--> Display at 00:18:13:29

and started doing things

in college.

--> Display at 00:18:17:05

And, you know, I got voted

for all kinds of awesome,

--> Display at 00:18:21:07

you know, I got all these

awesome awards, I got to travel,

--> Display at 00:18:24:01

and get selected to do

all these things.

--> Display at 00:18:26:05

But I didn't know

that I was doing

--> Display at 00:18:27:16

anything special to deserve,

you know --

--> Display at 00:18:30:25

-This is just

how you've been raised.

--> Display at 00:18:31:29

-Yeah, exactly.

You just kind of --

--> Display at 00:18:33:05

When you see a need,

you kind of fill it,

--> Display at 00:18:35:12

you know, and you see -- and also that whole thing about

--> Display at 00:18:38:04

personal, you know,

seeing people,

--> Display at 00:18:40:23

there's lots of people that,

--> Display at 00:18:42:22

you know, they're

not going to kind of

--> Display at 00:18:45:00

jump up and down and say,

"Hey, I need..."

--> Display at 00:18:47:06

But we also had a knack for

in our community recognizi--

--> Display at 00:18:50:02

you know, the quiet person

or the person that might need

--> Display at 00:18:52:20

help that might be

too proud to ask for help.

--> Display at 00:18:56:14

Or it wasn't about

just the leaders

--> Display at 00:18:58:25

standing up and down

and doing that.

--> Display at 00:18:59:26

-Was it at college

or before college

--> Display at 00:19:01:22

that you're -- that the arena

where you would be this way,

--> Display at 00:19:06:11

extended beyond

the Eritrean community

--> Display at 00:19:08:15

and into a wider community?

--> Display at 00:19:10:20

-It was just in college.

-Just in college

--> Display at 00:19:12:07

is when it happened?

-Yeah, I mean,

--> Display at 00:19:13:26

we were involved in sports

and activities in high school,

--> Display at 00:19:17:01

but all our, you know, it was

sort of we saved all our service

--> Display at 00:19:21:21

and all that stuff for

just within our community.

--> Display at 00:19:25:24

College was the first time

that I reached out

--> Display at 00:19:28:15

because, again in college,

--> Display at 00:19:30:18

at Washington

State University

--> Display at 00:19:32:17

there are not

very many Eritreans.

--> Display at 00:19:34:22

And so I had to look outside

of that to,

--> Display at 00:19:36:28

you know, but again,

there were no limits

--> Display at 00:19:39:25

because I already felt

like an outsider culturally.

--> Display at 00:19:42:13

There was nobody

my culture in college,

--> Display at 00:19:45:12

I was vice president

of the Samoan Club,

--> Display at 00:19:47:15

you know, chair of the Coalition

for Women Students.

--> Display at 00:19:50:19

I was the PR person

for the Filipino

--> Display at 00:19:52:26

American Student Association,

things like that.

--> Display at 00:19:55:05

Just things that are, and again,

I got into those things

--> Display at 00:19:58:22

by having a personal connection

with a person.

--> Display at 00:20:01:17

You know, my friend

is in this club.

--> Display at 00:20:03:07

I'd go with her to that club

and be involved

--> Display at 00:20:06:23

and help out volunteering

or whatever in that club.

--> Display at 00:20:08:26

And then I'd get voted

--> Display at 00:20:10:13

to be the vice president

of the Samoan Club,

--> Display at 00:20:11:18

that was kind of

the most random, I think.

--> Display at 00:20:14:02

I was like, "Okay."

--> Display at 00:20:15:05

But I felt comfortable

doing that

--> Display at 00:20:17:07

because everything was

outside of my culture

--> Display at 00:20:18:27

and everything was outside

of my identity.

--> Display at 00:20:21:21

So but then again,

it also helped me learn

--> Display at 00:20:24:17

that people we,

you know, have very distinct

--> Display at 00:20:29:28

and different identities,

cultures, all of that.

--> Display at 00:20:33:11

But there's a lot

of common things

--> Display at 00:20:35:17

that we share in common, too.

--> Display at 00:20:37:14

-How do you define

your identity now?

--> Display at 00:20:39:06

-Myself?

-Mm-hmm.

--> Display at 00:20:40:14

-Oh, I, um...

--> Display at 00:20:43:16

I'm American.

[ Laughs ]

--> Display at 00:20:47:01

What do you mean?

Like, I'm a --

--> Display at 00:20:48:04

-Yeah.

-I'm a female African American,

--> Display at 00:20:52:09

Eritrean Orthodox Christian,

US citizen person

--> Display at 00:20:57:29

that was born in Are'eta

and raised in Seattle,

--> Display at 00:21:01:07

pretty much, yeah.

--> Display at 00:21:02:08

Like, I'm all these

different things.

--> Display at 00:21:04:14

-But it's interesting.

I mean, American

--> Display at 00:21:06:01

came pretty early in your list.

--> Display at 00:21:07:13

Was there a time where American

would have come lower

--> Display at 00:21:10:12

in the list

or later in the list?

--> Display at 00:21:11:25

-I think senior high school,

before going away to college,

--> Display at 00:21:16:15

Eritrean would have

been number one.

--> Display at 00:21:18:13

I'm an Eritrean, probably,

--> Display at 00:21:19:27

I would have probably

called myself a girl.

--> Display at 00:21:21:16

I'm an Eritrean girl

that's Orthodox Christian.

--> Display at 00:21:25:10

And now I say African-American

or Black, you know?

--> Display at 00:21:32:11

And then I say, yeah, I consider

myself like Black first,

--> Display at 00:21:37:21

you know, and then American.

--> Display at 00:21:41:07

-And having grown up, you know,

in Seattle,

--> Display at 00:21:46:19

you know, it's interesting.

Just the word African-American

--> Display at 00:21:49:05

can connote lots of things.

--> Display at 00:21:50:16

Right, it can connote

African immigrant.

--> Display at 00:21:52:02

It can connote native-born American Blacks.

--> Display at 00:21:57:15

For you, do you deliberately say

that's all one big label,

--> Display at 00:22:01:16

one big tent?

And do you try to, you know,

--> Display at 00:22:06:04

how much do you want

to acknowledge the differences

--> Display at 00:22:08:05

between African immigrant communities

--> Display at 00:22:10:29

and African-American native-born Black communities here?

--> Display at 00:22:14:12

-Yeah, that's such a good

question,

--> Display at 00:22:16:00

because in applying for college,

there was no mark for me

--> Display at 00:22:19:17

to put African for most

of my applications.

--> Display at 00:22:22:01

So I would put other

and I'd write in Eritrean

--> Display at 00:22:24:17

because I identified

as Eritrean,

--> Display at 00:22:26:29

not as a Black person,

but, you know, going to college,

--> Display at 00:22:31:24

"A," I was like, "How come all my other cultural friends,

--> Display at 00:22:35:04

that are from cultural communities

--> Display at 00:22:36:25

have like support mechanism.

--> Display at 00:22:38:11

They got mentors

and they got all these things

--> Display at 00:22:40:10

that I didn't get,

--> Display at 00:22:42:10

which I think would have

helped me in college.

--> Display at 00:22:44:15

Anyway, that's a whole

different stories.

--> Display at 00:22:45:27

I should have just

marked Black,

--> Display at 00:22:47:29

but 25-plus years

into this American adventure,

--> Display at 00:22:54:01

you know, since coming

to America,

--> Display at 00:22:56:02

I look back now and I think,

--> Display at 00:22:58:24

you know, we were settled

in Mt. Baker in the hood,

--> Display at 00:23:02:12

you know, in 1983.

--> Display at 00:23:04:08

And while we were

Eritrean, the world

--> Display at 00:23:06:18

still saw us as Black,

and 25-plus years

--> Display at 00:23:10:24

in this American adventure,

I see that a lot of people

--> Display at 00:23:15:22

that came to America

around that same time,

--> Display at 00:23:20:26

a lot of them

ended up going to jail,

--> Display at 00:23:24:29

being involved with gangs,

you know, da da da,

--> Display at 00:23:27:04

you know,

all the same things

--> Display at 00:23:29:08

that were impacting

the Black community,

--> Display at 00:23:33:09

it had the same impact.

--> Display at 00:23:34:16

You know, it didn't

discriminate, you know,

--> Display at 00:23:36:22

didn't discriminate, like

a lot of the Eritrean males

--> Display at 00:23:40:02

that came with me,

you know,

--> Display at 00:23:41:23

ended up, you know,

not coming to not so great.

--> Display at 00:23:46:07

So it is really important

to recognize that, yes,

--> Display at 00:23:50:13

we are Eritrean. We are definitely immigrants.

--> Display at 00:23:52:27

You know, when I go home,

--> Display at 00:23:54:18

my mom is dressed

like an Eritrean.

--> Display at 00:23:58:09

We are speaking

Tigrinya at home.

--> Display at 00:23:59:24

We have our own very distinct

culture and there are,

--> Display at 00:24:04:07

you know,

experiences unique

--> Display at 00:24:06:11

to our community

and barriers

--> Display at 00:24:09:12

you know, specific

to our community.

--> Display at 00:24:12:06

But for me,

--> Display at 00:24:13:24

it is also very important

to acknowledge

--> Display at 00:24:15:23

that we are also

Black American.

--> Display at 00:24:17:12

We are Black people,

you know, in this country,

--> Display at 00:24:19:20

in that we share a lot with the

Black non-African community.

--> Display at 00:24:23:20

-You know, you say that

25 years plus into

--> Display at 00:24:27:11

your American adventure

and you're still so young.

--> Display at 00:24:29:14

So what's interesting to me is,

--> Display at 00:24:31:16

you know, over these years

of, and so,

--> Display at 00:24:33:14

so much of your adventure

has been doing this work

--> Display at 00:24:36:01

of connecting and creating

community and organizing

--> Display at 00:24:39:08

and so forth.

--> Display at 00:24:42:00

Do you feel like --

How is it different today?

--> Display at 00:24:44:18

Is it harder, is it easier

to create community,

--> Display at 00:24:47:19

to reach out to people across

different lines of identity?

--> Display at 00:24:50:18

Do you feel like people

are more open to this

--> Display at 00:24:53:08

or we're more closed today

than 10, 20 years ago?

--> Display at 00:24:58:22

-I don't know about people,

--> Display at 00:24:59:24

but I know that

I'm better at it now

--> Display at 00:25:02:07

because I'm more secure

in who I am

--> Display at 00:25:05:17

and what I have to offer.

And I'm a better listener now.

--> Display at 00:25:10:24

I'm better, like,

I'm able to do that,

--> Display at 00:25:17:01

whatever it is, better.

--> Display at 00:25:18:11

I'm better able

to connect with people

--> Display at 00:25:20:11

now than I did because

I had all kinds of things

--> Display at 00:25:22:10

that I was dealing with,

you know, a long time ago.

--> Display at 00:25:24:19

I wasn't as secure

in my identity

--> Display at 00:25:26:09

in reaching across the divide.

--> Display at 00:25:28:28

But now that I am

a little bit better at it,

--> Display at 00:25:34:08

I see how easy it can be.

--> Display at 00:25:37:22

You know, I have learned

--> Display at 00:25:39:28

how much of an impact that one,

you know, I do recognize,

--> Display at 00:25:43:01

there are big, systematic things

in the works

--> Display at 00:25:46:21

that are keeping lots of people, you know, media,

--> Display at 00:25:49:25

there are all kinds of things

to try to keep people apart

--> Display at 00:25:53:12

or keep people from engaging

with each other.

--> Display at 00:25:55:13

But I have also learned how,

you know, even how one person

--> Display at 00:25:59:06

really can make a huge impact

in another person's life

--> Display at 00:26:03:10

and how one person can have

a huge impact in the community

--> Display at 00:26:06:14

that they live in,

in the world that they live in.

--> Display at 00:26:09:05

-Um, what does Hidmo mean?

--> Display at 00:26:11:28

-Hidmo means home.

--> Display at 00:26:14:20

The word "Hidmo"

are the traditional huts

--> Display at 00:26:18:23

that people in the countryside

in Eritrea live in.

--> Display at 00:26:23:17

In Ethiopia,

they're called agudos.

--> Display at 00:26:25:05

So they're just --

it's a hut.

--> Display at 00:26:27:15

And so it's a home.

It's a house.

--> Display at 00:26:29:25

And so we have the tagline "Hidmo means home,"

--> Display at 00:26:31:28

because it was a home

--> Display at 00:26:33:16

for lots of different

things in the community.

--> Display at 00:26:36:16

-So in the last minute or so,

I want to ask you,

--> Display at 00:26:39:04

you talked about how, you know,

--> Display at 00:26:41:10

different spaces

have now spun off from people

--> Display at 00:26:43:08

who've been part

of the Hidmo family, right?

--> Display at 00:26:47:06

To what extent are you interested in, again,

--> Display at 00:26:51:19

affirmatively teaching others

how to create their own spaces,

--> Display at 00:26:55:00

whether they're coffee shops

or other,

--> Display at 00:26:56:26

you know, whatever it may be,

because it seems like you have

--> Display at 00:27:00:21

a lot of experience

that, I don't know.

--> Display at 00:27:03:20

Is it the kind of thing

where if you try to teach it

--> Display at 00:27:05:24

to somebody explicitly,

the magic disappears or?

--> Display at 00:27:08:03

-No, I don't think so.

--> Display at 00:27:09:14

I'm very interested in doing it.

--> Display at 00:27:11:05

And again, like we're talking

about Hidmo's impact in Seattle.

--> Display at 00:27:14:26

There are people in New Mexico

that have contacted us

--> Display at 00:27:18:06

saying "We came and we visited.

We know all about your space.

--> Display at 00:27:21:06

We want something like this

in New Mexico."

--> Display at 00:27:22:27

There's people in the Bay Area.

There's people in Toronto

--> Display at 00:27:24:27

that have contacted us

--> Display at 00:27:26:07

saying that they want

something like that.

--> Display at 00:27:28:07

But we were able to do

what we did

--> Display at 00:27:31:06

because we so strongly

identified

--> Display at 00:27:33:10

with the neighborhood

and the people.

--> Display at 00:27:37:19

And Hidmo really was just

an extension of who we were.

--> Display at 00:27:41:24

And we put everything

that we were into it.

--> Display at 00:27:44:03

And I think that's

what made it successful

--> Display at 00:27:46:11

because it's very genuine.

It was very organic.

--> Display at 00:27:48:21

And so I don't know

that I could teach it.

--> Display at 00:27:50:04

But if I visited New Mexico

and got to know

--> Display at 00:27:52:22

the people trying to run that,

you know, I could.

--> Display at 00:27:55:12

-It's all relationships,

isn't it?

--> Display at 00:27:56:19

-Yeah, exactly.

I would say, okay, so, you know,

--> Display at 00:27:59:04

I can go and tell

about my experience

--> Display at 00:28:01:24

in how we did it

and see if they can do that.

--> Display at 00:28:05:03

But I don't know if I can.

--> Display at 00:28:06:25

But I would be interested

--> Display at 00:28:08:09

because I think spaces like this

are completely necessary

--> Display at 00:28:11:14

and I hope that they can open all over.

--> Display at 00:28:12:27

I don't want to do them.

--> Display at 00:28:14:07

But, you know, I would love

to teach it if I could.

--> Display at 00:28:17:26

-Well, we in Seattle are sure

glad that there is a Hidmo here

--> Display at 00:28:21:14

and that there's going to be

a new Hidmo

--> Display at 00:28:22:26

soon in Washington Hall.

--> Display at 00:28:24:09

And Rahwa, thank you

for being part of this

--> Display at 00:28:26:16

and making this part

of your journey.

--> Display at 00:28:28:19

-Yes. Thank you, Eric,

for inviting me.

--> Display at 00:28:31:01

-My guest today

has been Rahwa Habte.

--> Display at 00:28:32:20

She's the co-founder of Hidmo.

--> Display at 00:28:35:00

And you've been watching

"Seattle Voices."

--> Display at 00:28:36:11

Please join us again.

And thanks for watching.

--> Display at 00:28:38:06

--> Display at 00:28:47:29

--> Display at 00:28:57:23

--> Erase at 00:29:07:18

--> Display at 00:29:15:07

--> Display at 00:29:19:24