

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #29
“Actually live with Bill Stainton of ‘Almost Live!’”
Sno-Isle Libraries, June 28, 2019



Jim Hills:	00:00:00	I'm Jim Hills.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:01	I'm Ken Harvey. Jim, what's coming up in this episode?
Jim Hills:	00:00:05	I couldn't be more excited. We're going to talk to Bill Stainton.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:08	The Bill Stainton?
Jim Hills:	00:00:09	The Bill Stainton, the legendary 29 Emmy Award winning Bill Stainton from Almost Live!.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:15	Almost Live!, I remember that show.
Jim Hills:	00:00:16	I remember it very, very well.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:19	Okay, now I'm excited.
Jim Hills:	00:00:20	No kidding.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:31	Welcome to season 2 and episode 29 of Check It Out!, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 4:	00:00:38	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:45	Jim Hills and I are joined in the studio this afternoon.
Jim Hills:	00:00:50	Our broadcasting headquarters.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:52	Our broadcasting headquarters nestled deep in the-
Bill Stainton:	00:00:54	Luxurious broadcasting headquarters.
Jim Hills:	00:00:56	Yes.
Ken Harvey:	00:00:57	Deep in the bowels of downtown Tulalip, Marysville.

(Continued)

Jim Hills: 00:01:01 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:02 Yeah, I think I was derided in an earlier episode for saying Puyallup by mistake.

Jim Hills: 00:01:07 Yes, you were.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:08 Okay, so not Puyallup, Marysville and Tulalip. Hey, we are joined for this episode with a very, very serious guy who was the executive producer for 15 years for a sketch comedy show called Almost Live!.

Jim Hills: 00:01:26 Legendary sketch comedy show.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:28 Legendary, and so I think our audience may recognize his name, Bill Stainton has joined us. Bill, thank you so much for being with us.

Bill Stainton: 00:01:36 Thanks Ken. Oh, it's a pleasure being here nestled in the bowels of Marysville. It's the dream.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:42 Well, it's beautiful. This is a beautiful place in-

Bill Stainton: 00:01:44 I would have said nestled in the foothills, but bowels, sure. Why not? We'll go with that.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:48 All right, well-

Bill Stainton: 00:01:49 It's your podcast.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:50 Thanks a lot Bill. Hey, Almost Live!, your name is associated with that. Why would people remember you for that? What was there about this show that made it so iconic?

Bill Stainton: 00:02:06 Oh, I think probably that it was local. That was the thing, our job was to make fun of Seattle, the Pacific Northwest, its neighborhoods, its customs, its people, that sort of thing. For our final 10 years, we were on just before Saturday Night Live. We were on from 11:30 to midnight, SNL was on from midnight to 1:30, and SNL-

Ken Harvey: 00:02:29 Were you the warm up act for Saturday Night Live?

Bill Stainton: 00:02:31 Exactly. We were actually the spoiler.

Ken Harvey: 00:02:33 Were they ones who then put people to sleep, after you had...

Bill Stainton: 00:02:38 Well, depends on who you talk to. We heard it both way. I know that Lorne Michaels, the executive producer of SNL was not thrilled to be pushed back in Seattle. We were the only market in the country that was able to do that. People would tell us, they said, "Man, you guys are so much funnier than Saturday Night Live", which technically, on any given week, may or not have been true, but I think what they were really kind of latching onto, was that we were local. We were making fun of things that were in... You know, if the Mariners played that day, we had jokes about it. We would have guests on, Gary Locke, the Presidents of the United States, local people who they knew, which SNL couldn't do.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:17 Are you saying Gary Locke was the President for a while, of the United States?

Bill Stainton: 00:03:21 No, but the reason I put those two together, I hadn't realized I'd done that. When he was the Governor, we had him on one show, I must have been like a New Year's special or something, because we had him on as the Governor, but we also had the Presidents of the United States of America, you know, the band with Chris Ballew and Dave Dederer and that?

Ken Harvey: 00:03:40 Yes, yeah.

Bill Stainton: 00:03:41 One of my favorite introductions that I ever wrote. I decided to have him introduce them, and the introduction was, "I may be the Governor of the State of Washington, but these are the Presidents of the United States of America." SNL is not going to do that.

Jim Hills: 00:03:54 You know what's fun about Presidents of the United States is Chris Ballew, you can catch him at many of our libraries-

Bill Stainton: 00:04:02 Caspar Babypants?

Jim Hills: 00:04:03 Caspar Babypants.

Bill Stainton: 00:04:04 That is an amazing show. I saw him at the historic Everett Theater a few months ago. Man, that's an amazing show.

Jim Hills: 00:04:12 Last time I saw him, he was at the Edmonds Library in the Plaza Room above, and I hadn't been really aware. My job is communications and marketing, and so Ballew's going to be down there. The weather was going to be great. Hey, let's go outside a little bit, see what we can do. We did, and that might have been a mistake, because he gets a crowd anyway. I

happened to be going down there while he was performing. I'd forgotten about it. "What's going on upstairs? Oh my God, it's Chris Ballew." It was completely packed. It was a sunny day, the doors were open. That plaza was filled with parents and kids. It was so phenomenal to see the kind of energy that he brings, and then what people are expecting from him. It's really fun.

Bill Stainton: 00:05:01 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:01 Yeah, he really knows how to draw a crowd.

Jim Hills: 00:05:03 Yeah, it's great, but I digress.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:05 You were executive producer?

Bill Stainton: 00:05:07 I was.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:07 For Almost Live!.

Bill Stainton: 00:05:08 I was the one that people would blame.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:11 That's why you were so serious.

Bill Stainton: 00:05:13 That's why I was so serious.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:15 You were also a cast member.

Bill Stainton: 00:05:16 I was.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:17 What was that like, having both of those roles?

Bill Stainton: 00:05:20 It was interesting. I'm probably one of the least recognized cast members, just because my main job was being the executive producer, so I wasn't... I was on every so, but not necessarily, certainly not as much as say John Keister, or Pat Cashman, Tracey Conway, people like that.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:36 Is that like being Stan Lee on all these Marvel movies?

Bill Stainton: 00:05:39 Pretty much.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:39 Making the cameo appearance.

Bill Stainton: 00:05:41 Some weeks it was little more than a cameo, other weeks, I had more of a featured role. It was interesting, because my primary job was... Well, there was a number of jobs that an executive producer does. Decide who's going to be on the cast, who's not.

Basically, I was responsible for hiring and firing, if necessary, staff, and cast, and that sort of thing. What I tell people is that if you saw it on the air, it's because I said so. If you didn't see it on the air, it's because I said so.

Bill Stainton: 00:06:13 Truth be told, it was much more democratic than that. I'm dealing with a staff of 10 people, all of whom were Emmy winners, or multi Emmy winners, so they knew their stuff. I would put them up against anybody, but sometimes if there was a debate, I mean, somebody has to be the boss. At some point, somebody has to say, "No, we're not going to do this", or "Yes, we are going to do this."

Ken Harvey: 00:06:36 Was being fired by you the same as being fired by Donald Trump in The Apprentice? It's like, my claim to fame was-

Bill Stainton: 00:06:43 Almost identical.

Ken Harvey: 00:06:44 ... I was fired by Bill Stainton.

Bill Stainton: 00:06:46 Almost identical. My career trajectory had been different, but...

Ken Harvey: 00:06:48 Are you saying there's no plans to run for 2020 for President of the United States?

Bill Stainton: 00:06:54 I can neither confirm nor deny.

Ken Harvey: 00:06:56 Okay. Stay tuned folks.

Bill Stainton: 00:06:58 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:07:00 If you decide, will you come back here and do it live here?

Bill Stainton: 00:07:03 Sure, I'll do it live here. I'll do it here.

Ken Harvey: 00:07:05 Okay.

Bill Stainton: 00:07:05 Unless Jimmy Fallon calls first.

Ken Harvey: 00:07:07 We'll make sure that doesn't happen.

Bill Stainton: 00:07:08 Okay.

Ken Harvey: 00:07:10 15 years is a long time to have a television program, so there must have been some success around that.

Bill Stainton: 00:07:17 There was, and we never thought, when King started the show, all of us who were involved figured, and I moved to Seattle in order to do the show. I started off in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, then moved to Portland, Oregon, then up to Seattle. I moved to Seattle specifically to do Almost Live!. I think all of us thought, okay, well do this for the next two or three years, maybe five. I think that was our outside dream that maybe we can milk this thing to five years.

Bill Stainton: 00:07:46 All of a sudden, 15 years later, we're all getting fat and bald, except for Tracey and Nancy. All of a sudden, when we started, we were all just in our 20s, irresponsible kids in our 20s, and when we ended, we were all like, "Oh my gosh, we've crossed over into our 40s, and how in the world did this happen?" By that time, I'd bought a house, so now I'm a Seattleite, this is...

Jim Hills: 00:08:12 Was that weird, in your 20s, to come across the country and be given a show like this, given a mandate? Actually, I'm surprised. I didn't realize that... When you're talking about coming over just to do the show at KING, I always imagined, apparently wrongly, that Almost Live! was an organic growth out of guys who were here, and you got together, and you had to talk somebody at the TV station into letting you on the air, but it sounds way more intentional than that.

Bill Stainton: 00:08:43 Well, there was part of that, but then they needed somebody to produce the show. It was kind of organic as far as the germ of the idea, "Hey, we'd like to do this." The great news at that time-

Jim Hills: 00:08:54 Come on kids, let's put on a show.

Bill Stainton: 00:08:55 Yeah, that's pretty much what it was, and at that time, KING-TV was owned by Dorothy Bullitt, Mrs. Bullitt. She owned the whole KING Broadcasting, which had TV stations up and down the coast, and in Spokane, and radio stations.

Ken Harvey: 00:09:10 Where I worked, for a Bullitt station in Spokane.

Bill Stainton: 00:09:13 That's right. Mrs. Bullitt, always Mrs. Bullitt, she was like in her 90s, and she firmly believed, and you don't see this as much anymore unfortunately, but she firmly believed that we were in business to serve the community, that we are here to serve the community. Now, we're not a charity. We're going to make money while we're doing it, but we're here to serve the community.

Bill Stainton: 00:09:35 The idea was that back in its golden days, the heyday, and I'm speaking as somebody who worked there long ago. I'm sure the people who are working there now would tell you, "You know, this is the heyday", but it's not. In the heyday, KING had the number one news department, had a great investigative department, a great documentary department. These are all ways to look at Seattle and the Pacific Northwest through different lenses. Also, the comedy show is yet another way to look at our community, with a slightly different take.

Jim Hills: 00:10:10 Yeah, because it wasn't just a comedy show, it was a focused local comedy show. It was looking at the things that made us what we were, and taking a different approach to it.

Bill Stainton: 00:10:22 Yeah, that was our strength. The initial idea, first of all, that was the context of KING at the time, that we want to do local, we want to serve the community, so hey kids, let's put on a show. At some point, somebody's got to produce it. They looked around the country twice, what I've been told, to try and find the right person, because they were looking for a specific combination of producing skills. They wanted somebody who knew how to do field production, where you take a camera out, and you tape things like Billy Quan, or The High Five'n White Guys, or those kinds of things.

Bill Stainton: 00:10:54 Since it was also going to be done on Saturday, we brought a live studio audience in, and taped the show, live on tape in front of a studio audience with a studio crew. They wanted somebody who has that background as well, plus somebody who understood and spoke the language of comedy. Because of various things I'd done in my life, I happened to, if it were a Venn Diagram, I happen to be the middle of the Venn Diagram. I happen to be the one person where all that intersection... Well, the second person.

Ken Harvey: 00:11:25 It's called the sweet spot.

Bill Stainton: 00:11:26 The sweet spot. Thank you. You could tell I was fumbling, and you bailed me out. That's what makes you so good Ken. I was the only... As I said, the second person, but Lorne Michaels already had a job. Yeah, they talked me into do it, and the really cool thing was for the first several years, we were not good. I mean, we had our moments. We had our moments, but first of all, for the first five years, we were on Sunday at 6:00 pm. We were an hour long show Sunday at 6:00 pm. That's a terrible time slot for comedy.

Jim Hills: 00:11:57 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:11:58 Yeah.

Bill Stainton: 00:11:59 The really nice thing was back when we began in 1984, there were only the three stations. I mean, Fox wasn't around, Cable wasn't around.

Ken Harvey: 00:12:09 Wait, wait, wait. We have to take a little pause here, because Millennials have no idea what you're talking about.

Bill Stainton: 00:12:16 That's true, they don't.

Ken Harvey: 00:12:17 They don't remember a world without 100 to 500 stations.

Bill Stainton: 00:12:20 Or streaming, you couldn't watch Almost Live! on your iPad, because the iPad didn't exist. It was a TV station.

Ken Harvey: 00:12:26 Was this in black and white days?

Bill Stainton: 00:12:28 It wasn't quite black and white, but there was only KING, KOMO and KIRO, was NBC, CBS, ABC, that's all Seattle had.

Ken Harvey: 00:12:36 You took your remote to go to those three stations [crosstalk 00:12:39]-

Bill Stainton: 00:12:39 Pretty much, yeah.

Jim Hills: 00:12:39 Remote?

Bill Stainton: 00:12:39 Yeah. Well, I think you had remotes back then.

Jim Hills: 00:12:42 And rabbit ears.

Bill Stainton: 00:12:42 They were big remotes that clicked audibly. The good news about that is that even if we weren't very good, which we were not, because we were trying to figure out who we were, somebody was going to watch us, because there just weren't any alternatives. We were allowed to be bad and figure out what our voice was, figure out who we were. That couldn't happen nowadays, but the planets aligned. We happened to be at KING-TV, which was the perfect sized station for a show like this. Happened to be under the leadership of a visionary woman who really got what broadcast TV can be and was at one point. Unique combination of talents, and the timing was great.

Ken Harvey: 00:13:33 Remembering this show over those years, do you have any favorite segments that still come to mind, or funniest segments?

Bill Stainton: 00:13:43 Yeah, there are a few that I remember for various reasons. It's like if you ask Ringo Starr, and I'm sure you've probably had Ringo here, or Paul McCartney, and you ask them, "Which songs do you like?" What both of them will tell you is that, "Well, when I hear one of our songs, I just think, "Oh yeah, I was fighting with John that day", or "Oh yeah, I was sick in the studio, but still had to..." they remember those kinds of things.

Bill Stainton: 00:14:07 Some of my favorite moments were when we had Bill Nye the Science Guy on. We invented Bill Nye the Science Guy. He was one of my writers, and then a guest canceled, and Bill filled in, and it was a hit. I maintain to this day that virtually nobody on the planet, and everybody on the planet knows who Bill Nye the Science Guy is now, but they've never seen him at his best, because the best Bill Nye the Science Guys were in the rehearsals.

Ken Harvey: 00:14:35 Really?

Bill Stainton: 00:14:36 That's when all the fun would happen, and all the ad-libs and that, and it was just tears down our cheeks funny, hilarious. Sometimes the experiment would work, sometimes it wouldn't work. About an hour later after rehearsal, we'd bring the studio audience in, and then try and recreate that. We did a good job with it, but it was never quite the same electricity. That was a favorite. I remember once when we had Joe Walsh on, the guitarist for The Eagles, and at that time, we had a live band.

Jim Hills: 00:15:08 I think that's kind of brave to schedule Joe Walsh at that point in his career.

Bill Stainton: 00:15:12 It was, but it was cool.

Jim Hills: 00:15:13 You must have had a backup.

Bill Stainton: 00:15:15 No, no backup.

Jim Hills: 00:15:16 No?

Bill Stainton: 00:15:17 No, no this was-

Jim Hills: 00:15:17 No net.

Bill Stainton: 00:15:18 This was season three, so we were still kids and didn't know what we were doing. We had a live band at the time, and I remember calling Joe, because he was going to be on the show. I said, "Hey listen, Joe, this may be too big of an ask, but we

have a live band." Without pausing, he said, "Have him learn Rocky Mountain Way in G." That's a big Joe Walsh song. Being in that studio is they ran through it the first time, there were only like five people in the studio. Our four-person band, Joe Walsh and me. It's like, this is great, cool. That's the guy. Right there, that's the guy. Those were cool. There was the time when we knocked over the Space Needle, and that kind of stands out. We were doing a live show on April 1st, I forget what year it was.

- Ken Harvey: 00:16:16 That's where the crack came from.
- Bill Stainton: 00:16:17 That's where the crack came from. We did a live show on April 1st of whatever year it was, and we didn't normally do live shows, unless it was like a New Year's special or something like that. I don't know quite why it happened this way. It was a Saturday, and we interrupted our own opening with a fake newscast, saying that the Space Needle had fallen over. Now, in our defense, this was well before 9/11 and that kind of thing, and we had a-
- Ken Harvey: 00:16:43 Well before H.G. Wells did his martian invasion.
- Bill Stainton: 00:16:48 We had our graphics department.
- Jim Hills: 00:16:50 Some say Wells took it from Almost Live!.
- Bill Stainton: 00:16:52 Yeah, exactly. We had our graphics make up some graphics here of the Space Needle crumbled in lower Queen Anne. We did make sure to say because of some made up reason, nobody was inside, nobody got hurt, and we had April Fool's Day flashing on this. We didn't think we'd fool anybody. What happened was, during the first break, because again, it's a live show, we have a live studio audience.
- Bill Stainton: 00:17:11 The studio audience is laughing, and we come back after the fake news cut in, and John Keister's the host, saying, "Well, bummer about the Needle." Clearly a joke, and then we have a few more jokes, then go to commercial. At that point, the KING 5 reception races into the studio, which had never happened before. She runs up to me, I'm sitting at my producer's desk, and she said, "You have just overloaded and shut down the entire KING-TV switchboard."
- Ken Harvey: 00:17:40 Wow.
- Bill Stainton: 00:17:40 It gets worse. "You've always overloaded and shut down the entire Space Needle switchboard." It gets worse. "You have also

overloaded and shut down the entire 9-1-1 Emergency System throughout all of western Washington." That was a memorable night.

Ken Harvey: 00:17:59 Oops.

Bill Stainton: 00:17:59 Yeah, oops. Oops. The following day, Sunday, I'm on the phone with Space Needle lawyers, all day long. They're threatening to sue me personally, KING-TV, NBC, anybody involved. Lawsuit, lawsuit, lawsuit and damage control-

Ken Harvey: 00:18:12 You're saying, "It was a joke. It's a joke."

Bill Stainton: 00:18:13 Right, but then on Monday, all of a sudden, it's front page news above the fold. Again, the kids won't know what that means, but it's front page news above the fold in virtually every paper in the United States. I mean, people from Tampa, Florida were sending me copies, and Las Vegas. All of a sudden, the same people from the Space Needle who had been threatening to sue me the day before on Sunday, now called me and said, "Listen Bill, how can we milk this thing?"

Jim Hills: 00:18:44 You get a free dinner out of it up there?

Bill Stainton: 00:18:46 Got nothing.

Jim Hills: 00:18:46 Nothing? Got nothing.

Bill Stainton: 00:18:48 No, that was actually the only time that we ever apologized on the air. We apologized the following week. We were asked to apologize virtually every week by offended viewers.

Jim Hills: 00:18:56 I was going to say, you apologized a lot. That was the only time on the air.

Bill Stainton: 00:19:00 That was the only time on the air, and the reason was because by shutting down the 9-1-1 System, we actually put lives in danger.

Ken Harvey: 00:19:08 Yeah.

Bill Stainton: 00:19:08 I mean, if you were having a heart attack or if like, "I think there's somebody in the house," well bummer.

Ken Harvey: 00:19:15 Wow.

Jim Hills: 00:19:16 I happened to be in Ballard yesterday driving.

Bill Stainton: 00:19:20 Oh, good for you.

Jim Hills: 00:19:21 Whenever I drive in Ballard, I'm always thinking of Almost live! and Ballard-

Bill Stainton: 00:19:26 The Ballard Driving Academy.

Jim Hills: 00:19:26 Ballard Driving Academy, yep.

Bill Stainton: 00:19:28 That's still one of my favorites, and when people come up to me, it's always High Five'n White Guy, Ballard Driving Academy, Billy Quan. The thing about the Ballard Driving Academy, it still holds up as a piece of comedy, but it's based on the fact that everybody in Ballard was old, slow and Scandinavian, and that's not true.

Jim Hills: 00:19:48 It's not true anymore.

Bill Stainton: 00:19:49 Ballard's a cool area, so if people move to the area and they check out YouTube, "Oh, what's this Almost Live! thing?" They find out and go, I don't get why this is funny, because there's a different-

Jim Hills: 00:20:00 Yeah, it's not the same.

Bill Stainton: 00:20:00 It's not the same.

Ken Harvey: 00:20:02 It was a snapshot in time.

Jim Hills: 00:20:03 Yeah.

Bill Stainton: 00:20:04 Yeah, and that's what made it really tough when we finally went off the air, when they fired us. Technically, we're still on the air. They're still running the re-runs. In 1999, it was getting tougher and tougher, because our bread and butter was the individual neighborhoods and the personalities, like Fremont had a personality, and Kent, Bellevue, they were all-

Jim Hills: 00:20:27 Now you'd have to do Fremont nude.

Bill Stainton: 00:20:28 Yeah, it would. It started getting tougher and tougher, because as more money washed into the area, and at that point, it was pretty much all Microsoft money. There started to be this homogenization, where everything was kind of the same. Everything kind of became this hip outer enclave of Seattle, because nobody could afford to live in Seattle anymore. The same thing's happening now through Amazon and that sort of

thing. All of a sudden, Frederick & Nelson is no longer, and we've got pottery barns everywhere, just like every place else in the world. It was really hard to find the comedy in a place where there's a certain saneness to everything.

Jim Hills: 00:21:10 Absolutely. Actually, that brings me to something that I'm really interested in hearing from you, because yes, Almost Live! is in re-runs, but you're really busy now doing other things. I really want to hear what you've transitioned to, and how that happened. Talk to us a little bit about what you're doing these days, and where is that common thread, because I think there is one.

Bill Stainton: 00:21:37 Well, there is. Nowadays, I basically live on airplanes. My primary living is a keynote speaker. I open and close a lot of conventions. On Monday, we're taping this on a Friday, on Sunday at 6:00 a.m., I catch a flight to fly to Atlanta, where I'm going to be the opening keynoter for the International Facilities Manager Association, 1,500 facilities management people.

Jim Hills: 00:22:01 Is our guy there?

Bill Stainton: 00:22:02 Probably, probably.

Jim Hills: 00:22:03 Yeah.

Bill Stainton: 00:22:03 Probably going to be there. That's what I do, and I speak to all kinds of audiences, all kinds of associations and corporations about things like leadership, and creative thinking, and producing under pressure. Those are my three key areas, all of which I got from Almost Live!. What happened was, when they canceled the show... In 1999, by that time, Mrs. Bullitt, the founder and owner of KING-TV had died. She'd been in her '90s, and the company was sold. It no longer was owned by family, by a person. It got sold to a company in Providence, Rhode Island, which then sold it to a company in Dallas, Texas, which is where it was living then.

Bill Stainton: 00:22:42 At that point, we were just a line item on a budget. They didn't really realize, oh no, Almost Live! is kind of an important part of the fabric of the Pacific Northwest, "It's just a line item, so let's get rid of this", so they did. That was a month after I had bought a brand new house and a brand new car. That was a little difficult. The timing was not ideal. I started thinking, I had some money saved up and some things, but I started thinking, "Okay, what can I do? I need another gig." You can't tell the bank, "Oops, sorry." Well, you can, but they-

Ken Harvey: 00:23:19 You can try.

Bill Stainton: 00:23:19 "Let me take the house back." I thought, what can I do? At that time, I thought to myself, "Okay, I'm a TV producer, but there's nothing else in the country that I would..." After Almost Live!, where do you go? I'm not going to go produce-

Jim Hills: 00:23:31 TV was clearly changing. We were seeing that at KING.

Bill Stainton: 00:23:35 It was changing.

Jim Hills: 00:23:36 Yeah, so where do you go and do the same kind of thing? There is no place.

Bill Stainton: 00:23:38 Yeah, and I can't be a news producer. That's not my world. I know how to produce comedy, and at that point, like I said, I'm in my 40s, I did not want to move to New York or LA. I considered both of those, and I knew people at the Letterman show, and SNL and places like that. It just wasn't for me. I actually had explored that a few years before, and been very well received, but I realized I kind of like it in Seattle now. This is kind of home now.

Bill Stainton: 00:24:05 I thought, what can I do? Okay, TV producing is out, because there's nothing that's intriguing to me. Well, I'm a joke writer also, I mean, by that point, I had written for the Tonight Show with Jay Leno, I had written monologue jokes, things like that. I thought, maybe I can do that. Leno, that's the Tonight Show. As big as it was, they paid \$50 a joke. I've got to sell a lot of jokes to pay my monthly mortgage.

Jim Hills: 00:24:31 Yeah, because a monologue's only so long.

Bill Stainton: 00:24:36 Exactly. There was a moment of panic. It's like, "Okay, so what in the world is my skill set? The things I'm good at, there's not really a market for. Almost Live! was the market. Then I started thinking, okay, wait a minute. Let's broaden the scope of what I know. For the last 15 years, I've led an amazing creative team to unprecedented results. I won a bunch of Emmy Awards, my staff-

Jim Hills: 00:25:07 How many did you win?

Bill Stainton: 00:25:07 29.

Jim Hills: 00:25:08 Yeah? [crosstalk 00:25:09].

Bill Stainton: 00:25:08 Missed number 30 by that much. My staff total, the total for Almost Live! as a show and the staff, was over 100 Emmy's. We also had 10 straight years of number one ratings, without a break. Every single week, even during vacation, during hiatus, during re-runs. Okay, that's pretty impressive results. I led an amazing team to some amazing results in a very highly competitive world. That's a skill. That's some experience. I also know a thing or two about creative thinking, about being innovate on demand, week after week, because we had to. We had to be creative on demand. Most people think creativity is like, "Oh, there's a lightning bolt from the sky." Well, if you're waiting for that and that's your job you're going to stop-

Jim Hills: 00:25:55 There's a process to creativity.

Bill Stainton: 00:25:56 There's a process to it, and that can be learned, and that can be taught, which is one of the things I talk about. I also know a thing or two about producing amazing results under pressure, because look, it's not brain surgery. I'm not going into a military engagement or anything, but still, that clock is ticking. It comes up to 11:30, you can't say, "Oh wait, hang on. We're not really yet." You've got to produce results, and every week you get the ratings to see how you did. Plus, 175 people in the studio audience are judging you, and then a million more on TV an hour-and-a-half later are going to be judging you.

Jim Hills: 00:26:28 That feedback loop, when you mentioned the ratings, that feedback loop, that immediate feedback loop just be a curse and a blessing.

Bill Stainton: 00:26:35 It is, and the most immediate feedback loop, this thing that always blows me away, and it still does today with what I do for a living now, is keep in mind Almost Live! was produced, written and performed pretty much exclusively by multiple Emmy Award winning comedy people. We knew what we were doing, but it was that studio audience of 175 people who, in all likelihood, never written a joke in their lives, who would tell us every single night whether or not we did our jobs well. It's like, "I have 29 Emmy's for this, and you're telling me..." "Yes, we're telling you that didn't cut it."

Ken Harvey: 00:27:07 You didn't have just sitting in reserve, that laugh machine just in case they didn't laugh on cue?

Bill Stainton: 00:27:13 No. We probably should have thought of that. There were times where we played to some dead air, and that's the way it aired. It aired to dead air. We didn't do any sweetening or anything.

Jim Hills: 00:27:23 As I recall, that was also part of the humor. When it bombed and I was watching, that made it as funny. To me-

Bill Stainton: 00:27:36 It didn't feel that way in real time.

Ken Harvey: 00:27:40 Glad you feel that way Jim. I don't think Bill's crew did.

Bill Stainton: 00:27:44 Right.

Jim Hills: 00:27:44 Look, they bombed.

Bill Stainton: 00:27:44 To get back to your question, once I kind of put those pieces together, and actually, there were some other speakers, like keynote speakers locally who knew who I was, and they said, "Hey, can you make my stuff funnier? I've got this speech, I'd like to be funner." I started writing jokes for other speakers, and the more I did that, the more I started to learn that this is actually a career. There are people making money doing this. I started kind of exploring that arena, and it's kind of fortunate. I mean, I know hundreds of professional speakers now, but I had kind of a head start, because it was really easy for me to get booked at first, because I had celebrity value, believe it or not, in Seattle at the time.

Ken Harvey: 00:28:29 I do believe that. I do.

Bill Stainton: 00:28:32 I could get booked fairly easily, not for much, \$100 here, \$500 there, something like that, but still enough to learn what I was doing, and mostly what I would do there, is a bunch of comedy things. I'd tell some Almost Live! behind the scenes stories, things like that.

Jim Hills: 00:28:48 That's not what you're doing now, right?

Bill Stainton: 00:28:50 That's not what I'm doing now, because I can't go to Atlanta, Georgia and tell Almost Live! behind the scenes. I can tell some. I can tell some stories about some things that Jerry Seinfeld told me, that have had a lasting-

Ken Harvey: 00:29:00 You can do some name dropping, and that gives you some-

Bill Stainton: 00:29:02 I can do some name dropping. I can talk about Bill Nye the Science Guy. For this group on Monday, the facilities managers, I'm going to tell them about the time that we lost a 12-foot boa constrictor in the building, and our facilities manager had to deal with that. Never found the snake by the way. No idea whatever happened to it. I have a theory that in seeking its own

kind, it went down to the newsroom, but I can't prove that. I could do that, but I realized that if I were going to expand beyond just the local market who already knew me and knew Almost Live!, I had to expand what I talked about, and that's when those three areas I talked about before, leadership, creative thinking, producing under pressure, well those are universals.

- Jim Hills: 00:29:47 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Bill Stainton: 00:29:49 I can look at them from an interesting way, so I can go talk to the Steelworkers Association, or Coca-Cola, or someplace like that, about leadership, but I can tie in, "Here's what I learned from Jerry Seinfeld. Here's what I learned from working with Ellen DeGeneres. Here's what I learned..." It's interesting, because those are cool stories, that's fun.
- Jim Hills: 00:30:11 When you're going and doing one of these keynotes, or other speaking engagements, you are getting immediate feedback from the audience, because you are live and doing that, but-
- Bill Stainton: 00:30:21 Same thing, yeah.
- Jim Hills: 00:30:22 I'm wondering what you're hearing back from the corporate folks who-
- Ken Harvey: 00:30:27 The organizer.
- Jim Hills: 00:30:27 The organizers. The people who wanted you to come, saw some value in the message behind that. How are they receiving that, and what's the value they're looking for?
- Bill Stainton: 00:30:39 Well, I keep getting booked, so the reception seems to be good. I am paying for the house, so that's good.
- Jim Hills: 00:30:47 Are you just Ubering now? The car's gone? [crosstalk 00:30:49].
- Bill Stainton: 00:30:48 Pretty much. Yeah, exactly. I get good response, because the person who hires me, the meeting planner, they're basically looking for two different things. There are kind of two outcomes that they're concerned about. The one is the outcome for the audience. Are they getting what they need? Are they getting things from me that will make them a better leader? That will make them a more creative leader. That will help them lead their teams better, in a high pressure situation for example. Are they getting that? That's the need of the audience, which of

course the meeting planner is concerned with, the attendees' needs.

- Bill Stainton: 00:31:25 The meeting planner has his or her own needs, which is, I tend to be either an opening or a closing keynoter. Is the audience engaged? Are they laughing? I had one meeting planner tell me, because I thanked her for bringing me in. I said, "I realize unless you've actually seen me before, it's a roll of the dice. You go to websites, and you pick one, and you hope that they're going to be good." She said, "I never relax until I hear the first laugh. Once you hear that..." The meeting planner's desired outcome is, she wants her attendees to think, oh wow. I am so glad I came. This is great. If I'm the opening keynoter, they go into the rest of the sessions feeling like, this is going to be awesome. That's a different outcome, and I've got to be able to provide both those outcomes.
- Jim Hills: 00:32:17 That's interesting how you're viewing the needs of the folks that you're dealing with, and a little separately right? You've got meeting plan needs, you've got corporate needs.
- Bill Stainton: 00:32:25 It is separate, yeah.
- Jim Hills: 00:32:26 Yeah.
- Bill Stainton: 00:32:26 Yeah, they overlap. Basically, what you've got to do is you've got to create a compelling worthwhile valuable message, in a way that is entertaining enough that they feel like this is a great show. Again, as an opener or a closer, you need to do that. If you're in the middle, that can be more heavy content, things like that, or if you're doing a breakout session. If they're trusting you to open their whole convention, they're putting a lot of faith in you.
- Ken Harvey: 00:32:53 Bill, I'm really fascinated with what you've shared with how you made that transition, because I keep coming across individuals through my personal and professional life, who they've essentially been confronted with similar issues. They enjoyed a certain level of success, or at least being able to get along. Things are kind of moving along, chugging along, and then suddenly something changes, and they're now forced to re-evaluate where do they go from here?
- Bill Stainton: 00:33:32 That's a tough place to be.
- Ken Harvey: 00:33:34 What I was hearing you say, is you have to really take stock of, who am I? What do I do? What have I been, and what do I know

how to do? Then, where are the opportunities for me to try and apply that? Sometimes, the immediate things you look at are not really where the opportunities are anymore.

- Bill Stainton: 00:33:53 Yeah, you've got to be able to take a broader picture. In the moment, that's difficult, because in the moment you're thinking, well if I'm not that anymore, who am I? If I'm not the producer of Almost Live! anymore, who am I? If I'm not getting the perks. I remember the first time, when something came to town, some show, some concert, whatever it was. I wanted to go see it, and it's like, "Oh wait, I have to buy a ticket." For 15 years, I never had to buy a ticket to anything. They would just show up on my desk. Usually, backstage passes. They would just show up.
- Bill Stainton: 00:34:30 It was like, well if I'm not the person who gets in free... I don't know how to do this. I don't know who I am. Especially, if it's a role that's fairly public. If you're the CEO of a major company, or something like that. If it's a role where there's a lot of prominence to it and that comes to an end, that's really difficult. In that moment, all you can think about is what you've lost, because that's what happens with change. Change is another topic that occasionally I'll weave into what I'm talking about. When faced with change, people first and foremost go to what they're going to have to give up, what they're going to lose, and that's reptile brain stuff. That's just the instinct of am I going to get eaten or not?
- Bill Stainton: 00:35:15 It takes some perspective, which can be time, it could be distance, it could be any number of things, to be able to look at that broader picture, just like I had to go through and go, "Well, I'm a TV producer, I'm a joke writer." Those were the immediate things, but it took a little while before I could think, "Wait a minute. I'm actually more than that." That's what people need to do in those circumstances. Yeah, it's a tough place to be.
- Ken Harvey: 00:35:38 You're managing your own change transition. It's just as tough as managing a company's need to transition through change.
- Bill Stainton: 00:35:46 It is, which is why sometimes it's good to get an outside perspective. It's good to get some help, whether it's through a professional career counselor, or a therapist, or just-
- Ken Harvey: 00:35:55 Someone like you.
- Bill Stainton: 00:35:56 Someone like me. Somebody sensitive. No, don't call me, I hate everybody. A spouse, a significant other, a group of friends,

whatever, just to be able to give you some perspective, because sometimes we're just so close to it we can't really see what your strengths really are, because we're so close. We tend to take our strengths for granted also, because once you get to a point where something comes easily to you, you tend to value it less, because you think, "Well, if it's this easy, it can't be that valuable."

- Bill Stainton: 00:36:25 With some of my fellow speakers, they're incredibly envious about the fact that I can write humor, that I can write jokes. To me, that's almost like taking dictation, it's so easy, but to them, it's like we'll pay you lots of money to do this. I said, "No, I'll just do it for free." "Shut up Bill. Let them pay you lots of money."
- Ken Harvey: 00:36:44 Hey, I think this is a great time to take a break. We'll be back in just a minute, for more with Bill Stainton.
- Speaker 5: 00:36:51 Join business people from around the region who are taking advantage of free expert business advice through Business Pros Classes from Sno-Isle Libraries. Find a Business Pro Class at a library near you, by searching online for events at Sno-Isle Libraries.
- Speaker 5: 00:37:08 We love hearing from our listeners and subscribers. Especially if you enjoyed a guest or have a suggestion for a future topic. Drop us a line at checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org. Again, that's checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org, and let us know what you're thinking. Don't be surprised if we read your comment or answer your question on a future podcast episode.
- Ken Harvey: 00:37:42 We are back now in the Studio with Bill Stainton. Well, you've also written a number of articles, and there was an article that you wrote where it was about encouraging bad ideas. There was a quote that you had in it, about you never know which is the idea that leads to the idea.
- Bill Stainton: 00:38:04 Oh yeah. Oh, that was a good one. Yeah, that was a good one.
- Ken Harvey: 00:38:10 I'm glad you agree. Just talk to me a little bit about that. Is that where creativity really comes from?
- Bill Stainton: 00:38:19 It is. It is one of the places, because creativity really is all about connecting dots. It's not about the lightning bolt coming out of the sky. A creative idea is almost never, I'm not going to say it never happens, but it's almost never something that nobody ever heard of before. What it is, it's somebody coming two or more things that nobody's ever tried to combine before. In

order to do that, you've got to be open to everything. One of our cardinal rules around the Almost Live! writing table was no self censorship. Around that table, anything and everything was said.

Bill Stainton: 00:38:54 I used to say, but it doesn't seem to be the case anymore, that I can never run for public office, because at some point, somebody's going to say, "Well, Mr. Stainton, isn't it true that at one point you said..." It almost doesn't matter how that sentence is going to end, probably yes, because we said horrible things around that table, because you never know, okay, clearly we can't do that on television, but what if we take that idea, and do this? It's the same thing in the corporate world. If you want that breakthrough idea, you've got to be open to all the ideas, the bad ones as well.

Bill Stainton: 00:39:27 If you're in a corporate boardroom, or if your team is having a meeting, you may not be able to go as far as we did with Almost Live!, because otherwise you're going to have a nasty meeting with the head of H.R. You've got to figure out where your own limits are, but within those limits, no self censorship, because yes, somebody, Frank might give an idea that is clearly outlandish and stupid, and could never happen. You've got two choices, you can either shut that down, or Julie can say, "You know, that won't work, but there was one thing you said in there, that if we could take this, because clearly we can't do what Frank said, but that makes me think of this, which might be doable."

Bill Stainton: 00:40:12 It may almost have nothing to do with what Frank said. Somehow, it just triggered something in her mind, but that trigger wouldn't have happened if Frank had not felt free to say the stupid idea, the idea that leads to the idea. You never know what idea that's going to be. We all have all these connections in our minds. Somebody says something, "Oh yes, I had a hot dog yesterday." Oh, that reminds me about when I was in Italy." Really? What's the connection there? It doesn't matter. There's a connection in my own mind, and that leads one to the Italy thing, and the Italy thing might be the million dollar idea. It doesn't matter where the connection came from, but it came from someplace, and there was somehow two synapses in my brain connected hot dog with Italy for some ridiculous, stupid reason. The reason isn't important. What's important is that the connection was made, and then all of a sudden, there's the next million dollar idea.

Ken Harvey: 00:41:04 You know what I love about your response to that, is it leads me right back to why you and I actually met. We met-

Bill Stainton: 00:41:14 That was a dark day.

Ken Harvey: 00:41:16 I think you're right, it was fairly dark. It was overcast in Mukilteo, Washington, which is where you live.

Bill Stainton: 00:41:22 That's where I live.

Ken Harvey: 00:41:24 We met at a little café, and we were chatting about your being part of our TEDxSnoIsleLibraries, I think 2017 event.

Bill Stainton: 00:41:33 I think that's correct. At Kamiak High School.

Ken Harvey: 00:41:36 At Kamiak High School, and the reason why this comes to mind is that with TED and TEDx, as an organizer, one of the things that I learned was TED is all about spreading ideas worth spreading.

Bill Stainton: 00:41:53 Correct.

Ken Harvey: 00:41:57 As you said, there are very few, if maybe none, new ideas, but there are recombined ideas that suddenly kind of pop out in ways that are fresh and refreshing, and maybe take your mind to a different place.

Bill Stainton: 00:42:17 Right.

Ken Harvey: 00:42:17 Take others to different places, and those are ideas worth spreading. You have done your own TEDx Talk, I think at Stanley Park.

Bill Stainton: 00:42:26 Stanley Park, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:42:27 In Vancouver?

Bill Stainton: 00:42:28 Yeah, The Queen Elizabeth Theatre, which is so cool, because the last time I had been there was to see Phantom, and now here I am.

Ken Harvey: 00:42:34 Then you were the Phantom that time you were time.

Bill Stainton: 00:42:35 I was the Phantom, yes I sang whatever the Phantom song is.

Ken Harvey: 00:42:40 The neat thing about your talk there, which we're going to include the link that in our show notes, so for audience listeners, please click on that link and watch Bill's talk. He starts out with this question to the audience. I think it's, how many of you like sitting next to a weird person, or something?

Bill Stainton: 00:43:00 Oh no, it was, do you like sitting next to weird people?

Ken Harvey: 00:43:02 Yeah, do you like sitting next to weird people? Which if I were to ask our group here, as we sit around the table-

Jim Hills: 00:43:09 Who do you see-

Ken Harvey: 00:43:12 Obviously, we do.

Jim Hills: 00:43:13 When you're flying Southwest, who do you seek to sit next to?

Bill Stainton: 00:43:17 Right. Yeah, and it was actually... I lead into a story that happened on an airplane with somebody sitting next to me. I won't spoil it for those who want to see the TED talk.

Ken Harvey: 00:43:28 I think in that talk, you talk a little bit about creativity. For the audience, it is well worth watching.

Bill Stainton: 00:43:39 It is, thanks. I'm biased of course, but I think it's a pretty good TED Talk. TEDx Talk, technically. You bring up the TED event that you coordinated, a TEDx event is kind of like, I think, because you see all these speakers, it's a day, or a half day of speakers, so you might sit through a dozen, a dozen and a half different speakers, all of whom talk about various different things that seem to have no connection, but as the day goes on, you start to make connections. Oh, well this is similar to what that person... This person is a restaurateur who's talking about how to hire a saucier and this person is talking about, this person was, I believe one of the women we had at the TEDx Talk that you did was an astronaut.

Ken Harvey: 00:44:32 Yes.

Bill Stainton: 00:44:33 All of a sudden, you start to say, oh, its similar processes that they're going through. I'm seeing a similar thought process. That's one of the magic questions that you can think of, how is this like this? How is being a restaurateur like being an astronaut? You think, you're not. The boring person will say, well, they're just not, and that's the end of the conversation. The more interesting person there was like, well, let's think. That's when the connections happen, when you start to see how... When you kind of force your brain to find connections that may not be there.

Jim Hills: 00:45:04 I'm curious about your experience with creating your TED Talk. I've had the privilege of watching three TEDxSnoIsleLibraries events be created, watched those speakers come in, seeing the

applications, seeing them come in for that first orientation, not have a clue about what they were about to go through, and then come out the other end transformed. You've had a ton of experience on camera, on stage, in front of large groups. How did the TEDx experience of preparing that, how did that work for you? How did that compare to your other experiences?

Bill Stainton: 00:45:46 Well, I don't think I've ever rehearsed any speech as much as I rehearsed that one. One, because the timing is so tight. If I'm doing a one-hour keynote, I can be a little loose. I can play with the audience. If something happens, I can play off of that. With a TEDx Talk, you don't really have that luxury. Now, I did a couple times, just because I kind of had to. Things happen, and you can't not respond, but you're always aware of the timing.

Bill Stainton: 00:46:16 It's kind of like, when I was in college. I took a poetry course, I was an English major for a short time, until I realized, ooh, I want to make money. There was a poetry course and a professor, a guy named Sanford Pinsker, the only thing I remember him saying is, in a well-written poem, everything that's there is there for a reason, and everything that isn't there isn't there for a reason. If a word is capitalized, it's capitalized for a reason. If there's a comma here, it's there for a reason. A well-crafted poem, because a poem is such a tight piece of writing, really just like a joke. A well-crafted joke, there's nothing there that isn't there for a reason, because there's not slop. There's no room for slop.

Bill Stainton: 00:46:59 That's kind of the way it is with a TEDx Talk. In a one-hour keynote, there can be some... Maybe I shouldn't use the word slop when I'm referring to my own work. There's room for extraneous genius, but with a TEDx Talk-

Ken Harvey: 00:47:13 Capitalized E.

Bill Stainton: 00:47:14 Yeah, exactly.

Ken Harvey: 00:47:16 ...and G.

Bill Stainton: 00:47:16 Yeah. With a TEDx Talk, so much of it is cutting. You come up with a first draft, and then a second draft, and a third draft, and you're almost never adding material. You're almost always cutting, refining, how can I say this in fewer words? I remember Jerry Seinfeld told me once that for him, a good day's work is taking an eight word sentence down to five words. That's a good day's work for him, because it's all about how can I say this in as a concise and powerful a way as possible?

Bill Stainton: 00:47:49 When you do that with a TEDx Talk, it's like learning a poem, or learning a song or something like that. You can't just riff on stuff. You kind of have to know it cold, and that's not typically where I live as a speaker. That was a-

Ken Harvey: 00:48:09 It's different.

Bill Stainton: 00:48:10 Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's different. It was a big audience. There was 2,500 people, which I've spoken to before, but it's a big audience. It's the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. The audience is kind of dimly lit, so you can't really see them, which I didn't like an awful, I like being able to see the audience and kind of play off of their reaction. As a speaker, one of the things you find out, whether it's a TED Talk, or a keynote, or whatever, it's a dialogue. You may be the one doing all the talking, but it's a dialogue.

Ken Harvey: 00:48:43 Yeah, they're speaking to you through their body language, and their eyes.

Bill Stainton: 00:48:48 Right, so you can tell, oh they're really digging this part, or I think I'm losing them. Yeah, exactly.

Ken Harvey: 00:48:55 You were a speaker for TEDxStanleyPark, and then you were an emcee for us at the TEDxSnoIsleLibraries [crosstalk 00:49:02].

Bill Stainton: 00:49:01 Yeah, that was a tough job.

Ken Harvey: 00:49:03 Why is emcee a tough job?

Bill Stainton: 00:49:06 Well, first all because you have to realize that you're not the star of the show, and I've got 29 Emmy's, come on. I'm used to be the start of the show. As an emcee, it's not about you. You had, I think there were maybe a dozen?

Ken Harvey: 00:49:21 Yeah, we had 11 speakers.

Bill Stainton: 00:49:22 Yeah, 11 speakers, all of whom were amazing, and that's another thing that's amazing, because at the rehearsal the night before, they were not all amazing. There were some, where you thought, I don't think this is going to go well at all. Somehow, I think I actually wrote a blog about this the following day, they all somehow rose to the occasion, which is just incredible to me. They all did a great job.

Bill Stainton: 00:49:50 The job of the emcee is not to be the star of the show. Obviously, I want to interject some energy when it's necessary,

and we talked about that sometimes during the breaks, okay, you need to get a laugh in there or something like that. Okay, so I'll do that. I've always said the role of an emcee is to be an entertaining traffic cop. I mean, your job is to get from point A to point C without making B the star. That was a weird analogy, I'm not sure that really worked.

Jim Hills: 00:50:17 Yeah, it works in kind of an odd way.

Bill Stainton: 00:50:22 Okay, I'll take that.

Jim Hills: 00:50:23 We're coming to expect that.

Bill Stainton: 00:50:24 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 00:50:27 I'm curious about how that experience is impacting you now. Again, I've seen we've had 50 odd speakers come through TEDxSnoIsleLibraries, and after the fact, the feedback we get is that it was somehow transformational for them. Whatever they learned in that process, not so much what they said, but the process of being able to do it ends up becoming something that they're using in the rest of their life. Did that work that way for you?

Bill Stainton: 00:50:59 It did, probably in similar ways, and also in dissimilar ways, because I am a professional speaker. For me-

Ken Harvey: 00:51:07 You're not just a professional, but a certified speaker.

Bill Stainton: 00:51:09 I'm a certified speaker professional.

Ken Harvey: 00:51:10 Yeah.

Bill Stainton: 00:51:11 I'm a CSP. That's the National Speakers Association highest earned designation, so yes, I'm one of those. Fewer than 10% of speakers in the world hold the CSP, but I'm one of them.

Ken Harvey: 00:51:20 Congratulations.

Bill Stainton: 00:51:22 Thank you. I got things out of doing my TEDx Talk in Stanley Park that would not necessarily be of interest to some of the other people who were on the stage with me. It's a five camera shoot, so you get great video. You're in front of 2,500 people, and fortunately, I got a really nice standing ovation at the end, so that's what we call the money shot. You want that. I got a great story. The story I start with, which is the airplane story. Again, I'm not going to tip it, but that's one that I hadn't even

thought about using before. It was just an incident that had happened to me a few years before, and all of a sudden, I was talking with somebody and looking for an opening, they said, have you ever had, blah, blah, blah. I thought, you know what? There was this one time. I can't tell you how many people come up to me and say, "I watched your TEDx. Wow, that first story." That was almost like a throw away idea. I've opened so many speeches with that now. That's great.

Bill Stainton: 00:52:17 I think beyond what it gives me as a professional speaker though, and what I see in other people who have done TEDx Talks, is you kind of get a sense of confidence and self worth. I mean, one, it's great to get up there and get some applause, but for a lot of people, this wasn't the case for me. I was talking about creativity and things like that, but there are a lot of people who give TEDx Talks who are really revealing things about themselves, like really personal stories that they might not have told anybody before. You see this catharsis, when they can tell it to an audience who accepts and embraces their bravery, their story, and actually get something from it. You almost see their posture change as they're going through during the course of their 12-minute talk. Then you talk to them afterwards, and they just feel great about themselves.

Bill Stainton: 00:53:16 Now look, I'm not unrealistic enough to think that that changes their life forever. It might, but at least, again, sometimes they are talking about the most difficult day, or the most difficult circumstance of their lives, and again, getting a positive response to that also, and reframes it. It's still a terrible thing that happened, but now they can get power from it. It's no longer owning them, they are now owning it. I see that time and time again in TEDx Talks.

Ken Harvey: 00:53:46 I think there's something so powerful about whether it's essentially sharing a personal experience, or sharing an idea that you think is important, and getting the validation and the acceptance from the audience that potentially can be life changing. If not life changing, it's still powerful enough in providing kind of a sense of people see me, they know me, they accept me.

Bill Stainton: 00:54:18 Right, yeah. I think Sargun Handa was one of the speakers at the TEDx Talk that I emceed, I think her life has changed. I mean, she's become quite an influencer.

Ken Harvey: 00:54:31 She was a, I think, 16, 17-year old at that high school, who got up on stage and kind of delivered her talk.

Bill Stainton: 00:54:40 Yeah, and it was a tough talk. It was a tough thing she was talking about. Again, go see it. Go online-

Ken Harvey: 00:54:47 Yeah, we'll list it in the show notes.

Bill Stainton: 00:54:48 ... and see it. I actually ran into her at the QFC in Mukilteo a couple weeks ago, and she's just like, there's an energy, there's a spark to her. Now, in fairness, there was before. She was always kind of, there was something in her personality anyway, but she's a strong person.

Ken Harvey: 00:55:10 Yes, she is. She's a remarkable human being.

Bill Stainton: 00:55:12 She is, and I think that was always there, but I think her TEDx experience has magnified it, and also been a mirror to her, to kind of validate that yes, I am an extraordinary person.

Jim Hills: 00:55:24 It gives her a framework to share, right?

Bill Stainton: 00:55:27 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 00:55:27 Going through the TEDx process gives you this new framework of how to share what you think you have, the value you have.

Bill Stainton: 00:55:37 Yeah, which is a really good thing. When we talk about the tightness of a TED Talk, nothing extraneous. A lot of times, when people talk about whatever their story is, they'll ramble all over the place, and they like, I don't get what the point is. Therefore, the point isn't made, or at least not in a very powerful way. You're right, if you're going through this experience of learning how to tell the story in a way that has maximum impact, that's hugely valuable. That's a really good point, Jim. I wouldn't expect that from you.

Ken Harvey: 00:56:06 Well, I'll tell you that-

Jim Hills: 00:56:06 People rarely do.

Ken Harvey: 00:56:08 ... being in your presence Bill, and the presence of our technical producer, who is sitting here on the side, and him making sure everything sounds right, the skills that the two of you have just remind me that my family typically tells me when I'm trying to tell a joke, they tell me don't give up my day job. Hey, I wanted to, in the last few minutes we have, I wanted to draw you back to your roots. You've mentioned, I think, Ellen DeGeneres, Jerry Seinfeld, Bill Nye, Mr. Walsh of the Eagles.

Bill Stainton: 00:56:42 Joe Walsh, Jay Leno.

Ken Harvey: 00:56:43 Yeah, Jay Leno, a number of big names. I'm sure you could rattle off many others, and evidently you've been speaking to groups as a keynoter for probably a number of corporations and associations that people would recognize the names of.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:03 Oh yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:08 You're a multi Emmy Award winner.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:12 Now you're just embarrassing me.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:17 All the years of success with Almost Live!-

Jim Hills: 00:57:22 I am so curious where this is going.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:24 Me too. Yet, you're just a terrible human being. How is that possible? Why do things happen to bad people? Well, that's a good question Ken, but...

Ken Harvey: 00:57:34 Actually, that's not where I was headed, but if you'd like to pursue that one.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:38 Ha, okay. My bad.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:38 That angle, we could go there.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:40 No, I probably shouldn't have said that. Probably shouldn't have, we can edit that out.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:43 Well, where I was going to do was, all of that success that you've had and that you've achieved, and you're from Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:53 I am. Lancaster, by the way.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:54 Lancaster, sorry.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:55 Lancaster.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:55 Lancaster.

Bill Stainton: 00:57:56 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:57:57 Which my wife and I had the opportunity to drive through last year. Beautiful country.

Bill Stainton: 00:58:01 It is, farm country.

Ken Harvey: 00:58:02 Farm country.

Bill Stainton: 00:58:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ken Harvey: 00:58:04 When you were six, seven, eight years old, did you have any idea that this is where your life was going to be headed?

Bill Stainton: 00:58:12 Yes. I knew exactly I was going to get 29 Emmy's and hang out with rock stars like Pearl Jam and Nirvana. Yes, that's exactly what I envisioned. No, of course not.

Ken Harvey: 00:58:19 Well, tell me about that.

Bill Stainton: 00:58:20 Of course not. My back yard growing up, was an Amish dairy farm. We weren't Amish, but our neighbors in the back, it was an Amish dairy farm. I'm pretty sure, with muscle memory, I can still milk a cow. If push came to shove, I think I can do that. I don't think you ever forget that.

Jim Hills: 00:58:35 Yeah, I bet not.

Bill Stainton: 00:58:36 Yeah, probably not. No, of course not. I mean, when I first went to college, I thought, okay, maybe I'll be an English teacher. You just don't think of those things. I've always kind of thought there are two ways to be successful in life. One is to know where you want to go in life, figure out, this is what I'm looking for. This is the mountain top, this is what I want to reach, and then designing your life to hit that peak. Ross Shafer, who is the original host of Almost Life! is very good at that. He sets a goal, this is what I want to do. Now, what do I need to learn? Who do I need to meet? What do I need to do to get there? He does that long term. Some of it's short term.

Bill Stainton: 00:59:31 Then there's the other way, which is the way that I, I don't think I chose, it's just the way that it happened with me, is you start down one path, all of a sudden you get to a fork in the road. Oh, which one seems to be more in keeping of where I want to be, even if you don't know where you want to be? Okay, well lets take this fork. You do that, and it leads to another fork. As a six-year old in the shadow of the dairy farm, I could never have predicted Almost Life!, it didn't exist. If you want to do a comedy show, it was New York or LA, it was the Carol Burnett Show. Those are unreachable. You never thought, well, maybe in Seattle, they'll invent a show, that blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Bill Stainton: 01:00:10 That was just one of those forks in the road, and there's opportunity, I'll do that. It was not part of any great plan, and I envy those people who can do that. I envy the Ross Shafers. Ross Shafer, by the way, is worth a lot more money than I am right now, because that's not a bad way to do it. Say, this is what I want, this is what goal and let's do what it takes to get there. That wasn't my path, though.

Ken Harvey: 01:00:36 I think it's pretty remarkable that with the forks in the road that came at you, that you continue to move either to the right fork, or to the left fork, and-

Bill Stainton: 01:00:55 Whenever I came to one of those forks, one of the questions that I would ask myself is, which is the safe route? Then I would always try and take the other one. The safe route is only going to give me more of what I always have. You don't learn, you don't grow through that.

Jim Hills: 01:01:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bill Stainton: 01:01:10 I would always try and take the one that had a little bit more risk, as long as it fit other criteria, but that was always kind of, which one is going to stretch me a little bit more?

Ken Harvey: 01:01:20 Is that the subject or an angle that you take in any of the talks that you give?

Bill Stainton: 01:01:25 Not up until now.

Jim Hills: 01:01:27 I was just going to say, as you're talking about that, and talking about the way you've approached how you ended up here today, for example, how that also applies to what you were talking about creativity. How you got an idea. That's not exactly, that path doesn't look like it's going to work, but you know what? There's this other path that takes off on the side here, and we go that way, and maybe there's another, and it angles off this way, and it angles off that way.

Jim Hills: 01:01:56 I was thinking about, as you were talking about that, about creativity and messages you give to corporate clients. That must be empowering for them to see a possibility of bringing creativity to their organization, to their meeting, to their project, to their something, and that they can see how that occurs. Part of it is what you were just describing with your own life, is forks, and being able to have this process, and it's okay. Back to that no bad idea, right?

Bill Stainton: 01:02:31 Yeah, I think that's true. Another thing very similar to that, is a lot of times, they're kind of amazed that, oh my goodness, we are creative. I've given creativity workshops to tax accountants, to lawyers, to people that you wouldn't think of as, because most people think, oh the creative types. Those are the dancers, the poets, the singers, the actors, the painters. That kind of thing. No, that's one delivery channel for creativity. We're all creative. Creativity is just putting together a couple of things and coming up with a better way of doing something. It can come from anywhere.

Ken Harvey: 01:03:09 Can I jump in on the analogy of the fork in the road?

Bill Stainton: 01:03:12 Sure.

Ken Harvey: 01:03:13 It just occurs to me, listening to you talk, and then Jim's question, that that fork in the road, you don't always see the fork. All you see is that suddenly a tree has fallen across your path-

Bill Stainton: 01:03:28 Yeah, it does look like that sometimes too.

Ken Harvey: 01:03:29 ... or suddenly, the ground has opened up, and there's a chasm, the road leads right into a chasm.

Bill Stainton: 01:03:36 Right.

Ken Harvey: 01:03:37 The fork is actually the choice of where do I go from here?

Bill Stainton: 01:03:41 That's the key word, there's a choice. A lot of times, we don't... Again, in the moment, we were talking about if you lose a position, and what do I do now? It's easy to forget that there is a choice.

Ken Harvey: 01:03:52 Is that the nature of improvisation? Is that what improvisation is really about?

Bill Stainton: 01:03:57 Yeah, it is. Improvisation, if you're talking comedic improvisation or something like that, or musical improvisation, it's all about making a choice in the moment. One of the greatest jazz pianists ever, a guy named Oscar Peterson, phenomenal. If you have never listened to him, listen. He could do anything. He's gone now, but at lightening speed. He was just amazing. I had a chance to interview him once, and I had done my research. One of his old piano teachers back in Canada, he's a Canadian guy, had said, "I don't think Oscar's fingers could make a mistake if they wanted to."

Bill Stainton: 01:04:32 I said that to Oscar. He laughed and said, "She said that?" He said, "No, look. Let me just tell you. I make mistakes all the time, but here's what happens. Let's say I'm doing a run." For him, a run would be like 64th notes, or 128th, blitz speed, lightning fast. "I mean to end on an E flat, but my finger slips and ends on E, instead, well that just changes the harmonics and the dynamics, so I'll just change based on that."

Bill Stainton: 01:04:59 Now, again, that's happening in probably a hundredth of a second, but that's improvisation. That's like that tree in the road, that E, instead of the E flat. Okay, what do I do with that now, because you have a choice? Oh, now I can... Sometimes it's like, oh now it opens up a new path that I never would have seen before, if that tree hadn't fallen. Yeah, choice is a real key word there.

Ken Harvey: 01:05:26 Yeah, because I think that in some ways, companies themselves, when they're talking about being agile, really they're considering whether or not they can improvise. Can they take a real time situation and change on a dime, based upon that, and not lose themselves as they essentially go off, maybe in uncharted territory?

Bill Stainton: 01:05:51 Yes. Yeah, which is risky, because if you're talking about a corporation, there's money at stake.

Ken Harvey: 01:05:55 Right.

Bill Stainton: 01:05:58 It's not terribly risky if you're playing piano and you hit a wrong note and do something different. There's not a lot at stake there. The more there is at stake, the more difficult it is to improvise, to take risks, to be creative. Without doing that, your business, your corporation, your industry is going to slowly die, or quickly die. You've got to be willing to take those risks and embrace the change, and be willing to be creative. Be willing to play what if. What if we were to do this? How is this like that? Who else has solved a problem like that? Ask those kinds of questions.

Jim Hills: 01:06:35 Right. Well, it's been really intriguing. This is exactly what I wanted to hear and explore with you, because I was a big fan of Almost Live!.

Bill Stainton: 01:06:47 Was? Past tense, okay.

Jim Hills: 01:06:49 Am.

Bill Stainton: 01:06:49 No, I understand. I understand, no that's...

Jim Hills: 01:06:50 Well, that's okay.

Bill Stainton: 01:06:51 People's taste change. I understand, you know?

Jim Hills: 01:06:54 I didn't share my actual favorite episode. I'm going to leave that for after the mics go off. Taking those lessons and how they become life lessons. For personal needs, and in the business world. There really are parallels.

Bill Stainton: 01:07:13 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 01:07:14 It's really intriguing.

Bill Stainton: 01:07:16 It turns out it's the same world, and there are a lot more universalities than we think.

Ken Harvey: 01:07:23 Well, we discover that as we age.

Bill Stainton: 01:07:27 We do, because we start to see the patterns. It's easier to see the patterns, and we see how we are really more alike than we are different. I think that's an important lesson in today's times. We really still are more alike than we are different.

Ken Harvey: 01:07:39 I want to end by asking you to go back through your memory banks for a library story, or a reading story, or a book story. What can you recall in terms of maybe an early memory of being in a public library, or picking up a book that meant something to you, or someone doing something with you that was around reading, or something around the library?

Bill Stainton: 01:08:09 Well, my first memory of a library was the Lancaster County Library. I still remember exactly where it was. I remember what it looked like. To me, it was magical, because you go someplace. Even now, you go into my house, there's these books. Books everywhere. I have a hard time getting rid of books, because there's life in there. You never know, even though you haven't picked one up for 20 years, all of a sudden tomorrow might be, "Oh, you know what? I've got that. I've got that resource there." The Lancaster County Library, I thought it was a huge place. These little kids, there's books everywhere, and you just want to read them all, and there's no time to do that.

Bill Stainton: 01:08:48 I do remember sitting down and having one of these story times, and you do it at Sno-Isle also, where as a kid, you sit down and somebody comes in and reads a story. When you get

somebody who can really read a story, and make it live and breathe, and just jump off the page, now if you're reading yourself, you kind of have to do that for yourself. Man, it's like watching a magic show, because they're creating something out of nothing. First of all, the author creates something out of nothing. This is if we're talking a fiction book.

- Ken Harvey: 01:09:20 Yes.
- Jim Hills: 01:09:20 Right.
- Bill Stainton: 01:09:20 When you're six years old, they're not going to, hey it's kids' reading day, and they're not going to come and read A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking. They're going to read Dr. Seuss or something like that, or Harry Potter, but the way they can just take... It still is amazing that all it is, is ink splattered over paper. That's all a book is. For you kids in the audience, books are actual physical objects... It's just ink splattered over a page in these weird shapes that mean nothing, and yet they mean everything. I mean, the whole universes live inside these things. It's an amazing experience. Eventually, I've been to the Library of Congress, which is bigger than the Lancaster County Library, but every library is special. I go to the Mukilteo Library, which is smaller. It's one of the Sno-Isle Libraries, but still-
- Ken Harvey: 01:10:11 It's still a magical place.
- Bill Stainton: 01:10:13 It's a magical place. 100 lifetimes would not be enough to read everything, even in a smaller library, plus they're such amazing parts of the community. I mean, even as a kid growing up in Lancaster, the library was always hosting things. It was a gathering place. It was a place where somebody can come in and give a talk or something, because it's not just about books, it's about knowledge, it's about-
- Ken Harvey: 01:10:36 Ideas.
- Bill Stainton: 01:10:36 A library is sharing of ideas. It's just like TED. It's sharing of ideas, sharing of knowledge, and the fact that this stuff is available to us is still remarkable to me.
- Ken Harvey: 01:10:50 Absolutely.
- Jim Hills: 01:10:51 Thank you so much.
- Ken Harvey: 01:10:52 Thank you so much Bill. This has been great.

Jim Hills: 01:10:53 Thanks Jim, thanks Ken. Really appreciate it.

Ken Harvey: 01:11:03 Gosh, that was a lot of fun.

Jim Hills: 01:11:05 Oh my gosh. I was laughing the whole time. Even when he was serious, I was laughing.

Ken Harvey: 01:11:09 Yeah, he's a seriously funny guy.

Jim Hills: 01:11:10 There you go. Again, as we were getting ready for this interview, I really wanted to meet him, I wanted to hear more about Almost Live!, because I was an active watcher. I was here, I was watching Almost Live!. It was a big deal. It was part of my life.

Ken Harvey: 01:11:30 Yeah, I was part of the audience too.

Jim Hills: 01:11:32 I wanted to know what he was doing now, and what the connection was. He did it. He is really taking the core of what's behind comedy, and connecting with audience, and building that into a message that he takes to the corporate world, to the TEDx world, and that continuation of that, understanding the creativity, the pressure that comes with creating comedy week in, and week out, a live TV show, he's doing that. It's really interesting to see the thread that runs through it all.

Ken Harvey: 01:12:11 Well, not only to me is it interesting, but I think in some ways, he's a case study worth following and worth emulating, given how he has taken different forks in the road, overcome some things, going from success to success, but being willing to risk some failures along the way, and has achieved continuing a legacy of reaching new heights.

Jim Hills: 01:12:42 For most of us, no matter how old you are, you're going to have all of that happen in your life. To be able to listen to somebody like Bill, who's had those experiences and how he's moved through those, the kinds of things that he's held onto and learned, those are great lessons for us all.

Ken Harvey: 01:12:58 Yeah, and I really appreciated learning in this by researching him, and having him talk about it. Coming from humble beginnings, saying the Amish dairy farm behind them-

Jim Hills: 01:13:14 That he can still milk a cow.

Ken Harvey: 01:13:15 That he can still milk a cow himself, and coming from those humble beginnings, and achieving the things that he has, and remaining really humble and accessible. He is a genuinely-

Jim Hills: 01:13:27 Nice guy.

Ken Harvey: 01:13:28 Nice guy.

Jim Hills: 01:13:29 Yeah, pretty much.

Ken Harvey: 01:13:31 Really appreciate not only the humor, but the wisdom that he brought and shared with us, and I can see why he is being sought out by different corporations, and different associations, different groups to come in and chat with, because he has things to share.

Jim Hills: 01:13:45 He does. The other part that I thought was really interesting, just listening to the way he approaches his business side now. He's not only thinking about the audience that is in front of him listening, he's thinking about the people that are hiring him and what their needs are, how he meets those needs. It's really analogous to me, to back to his TV days. What's the audience? What's the need? Where's the context? Is he delivering? It's all great lessons. It's all really interesting stuff.

Ken Harvey: 01:14:19 Well, I always enjoy talking to individuals who can name drop other names.

Jim Hills: 01:14:24 Well, there's that too.

Ken Harvey: 01:14:28 Even in his name dropping of names like Jay Leno and Joe Walsh from The Eagles, and Ellen DeGeneres, and others, it was really neat to hear him still appreciate meeting individuals in his own community, and interacting with folks locally here, like some of the other speakers from the TEDxSnoIsleLibraries event that he helped emcee. I just really appreciate who he is, and consider him one of the heroes from our area.

Jim Hills: 01:15:07 Yeah. It is fun to see the depth and variety of what's here right in our community. There is a Mukilteo in Marysville, and he's this guy. He's got all of this going on.

Ken Harvey: 01:15:21 That was Bill Stainton, 29 Emmy Awards, and 15 years of Almost Live! executive producer and bit parts on the show, you might say. Just a great example of the type of people we have living in our region.

Jim Hills: 01:15:40 It's fun.

Ken Harvey: 01:15:42 If you enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe so you can receive every episode automatically. Until next time, remember your

library has a lot to offer you, so what are you waiting for? Check it out.