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INTERVIEWEE: Tim Jones

INTERVIEWER: David Todd

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David Todd [00:00:02] Well, good afternoon. My name is David Todd, and I have the great privilege of being here with Tim Jones. And with his permission, our plan is to record this interview for research and educational work on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas, a nonprofit, and then also for a book and a web site for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for permanent storage and access at an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

David Todd [00:00:43] And I also wanted to just emphasize that Mr. Jones would have all rights to use the recording as he sees it.

David Todd [00:00:53] And before going any further, I just wanted to make sure that's okay with you.

Tim Jones [00:00:59] Yeah, sure.

David Todd [00:01:00] Oh, good. All right. Well, let's get started. It is Sunday, May 22nd, 2022. It's about 2:15 Central Time. As I said, my name is David Todd and I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas and I am in Austin.

David Todd [00:01:21] And we are very fortunate to be conducting an interview with Tim Jones, who is at times in the Austin area, but I think today is out in Wimberley. Mr. Jones is a videographer, a photographer, a researcher, an environmental activist, a land steward - many things. I think he's well known in particular for documenting and bringing attention to conservation problems in the Hill Country. And certainly one highlight is his role in filing the petition to grant emergency endangered species listing for the golden-cheeked warbler.

David Todd [00:02:07] So today we'll be talking about his life and career and especially focus on his work with the golden-cheeked warbler.

David Todd [00:02:18] So, Mr. Jones, would you maybe get us started by telling us about your childhood and early years and if there might have been some people or events in your life then that influenced your interest in nature and animals?

Tim Jones [00:02:37] Well, yeah. I'm an army brat. My father was an officer in the army of America, I believe. Wasn't it what they called it during World War Two. He enlisted, went to OCS and became second lieutenant. And they sent him to Italy. And he fought for the country. And then later on, he went to Korea and was over there for a period of time.

Tim Jones [00:03:14] And I was growing up then, early, with my father overseas most of the time. And so I recollect living in Omaha, Nebraska, and that's when he went to Korea. I don't

recollect much of when he was in World War Two, since I was born in 1943, so I don't remember any of that. But we moved a lot since he would be stationed at various army posts throughout the country and the world. And so we, we went from Nebraska up in Omaha, and to Fort Sill, to Fort Benning, and then down to Fort Kobe in Panama in the Canal Zone.

Tim Jones [00:04:15] And that's where I was about ten, and that's when I became more familiar with wandering around out in the jungle. And, you know, as an army brat, you don't really accumulate very many friends because you're moving on all the time, you know? You'd be somewhere for a couple of years, you'd barely make a friend, and then you'd have to move again. And so I was pretty much self-dependent on entertaining myself. And the way you did that was to go out in the jungle or out in the, since we lived on an army post that we'd quite often be near the ranges, the firing ranges and things like that, and just a lot of open space. So I'd wander around in those places. And that's how most of my childhood evolved.

Tim Jones [00:05:19] From Panama, my mother had an illness. We had to be medevaced to San Antonio. And that's where I went to junior high, I guess the last year of grade school and then the first two years of junior high were in San Antonio where I used to wander around down in on Salado Creek and out in that area. And I used to collect turtles and whatever kind of wildlife. I was just a little kid, you know, I was 12 or so. And so that just became a way of life for me, was to wander around out in the creek bottoms.

Tim Jones [00:06:08] And from there, we went to Shreveport, Louisiana. I went to high school there. And there, we, I did stay for a long time. And even after my father retired there, he went down to Houston. But we, my mother and brother and I, stayed in Shreveport so I could finish high school there. And, there again, a lot of what, I didn't have friends then, and a lot of what we did was just go out and, you know, be like kids, out, out in the, out in the woods. You know, we had, we had our .22s and just camped out and generally, you know, occupied ourself with what a kid would do out in the woods, you know, just that.

Tim Jones [00:07:00] So after that, I went to the University of Kansas and I studied there for two years. And it wasn't, for me, the most agreeable place. It was far away from my parents. I didn't know anybody. I didn't live in a fraternity, but I didn't really fit into a fraternity very well.

Tim Jones [00:07:23] And after two years, I came down to Austin, Texas, and that was my junior year of college. And I, I got with a group of skydivers. And so I became a skydiver. And one of those guys kind of knew about the environment around Austin. You know, back, back in 1963 or '4, the outskirts of Austin was just outside of Barton Pool. Just down the creek - Campbell's Hole. You know, upstream of, of Campbell's Hole was undeveloped.

Tim Jones [00:08:20] And we used to go out there on days when it was too windy to skydive. There was a place there. There were these cliffs over Campbell's Hole that we used to cliff dive off of - a pretty harrowing experience, but we did that.

Tim Jones [00:08:43] And so that's where I became familiar with Barton Creek and that particular that particular place. This was in the sixties, so we went through most of the hippie scene in the sixties for some years.

Tim Jones [00:09:01] And in 1975, I left and went to Houston and got a job working offshore. I worked for Petty-Ray Geophysical as a navigator on a seismic boat. And then when those jobs ended, I became, I worked as a junior observer in South Carolina looking for I can't

remember the name of a fault that used to cause earthquakes in that part of the country. Rare thing.

Tim Jones [00:09:37] And after that, I came back to Houston and got a job in the oil field as a mud logger, and that was probably the longest job I had, until about 1983, working out, again out in the boondocks, out in the oil field and, you know, recording, you know, the the gas shows and drilling rate and various things have to do with drilling for oil and gas.

Tim Jones [00:10:12] And then the oil business collapsed. Actually in 1982, the company was working with (it's called Gas Log), it survived for actually another year because it was such a demand. But after that, the whole thing collapsed and it became very difficult to find work. And I ended up in not very good circumstances down in Houston, and left.

Tim Jones [00:10:53] And came to Austin with a backpack and a duffel bag. That's, that's how I got back to Austin in late, I guess, August of 1984 or September. It was on the tail of a hurricane that was blowing into town that hurricane blew into town.

David Todd [00:11:16] Alicia. I remember it well.

Tim Jones [00:11:19] Yeah, right. And I left as it blew in. And that was about one of the last times I've been to Houston. Houston and I didn't agree very well. It was a town that well, a big city. And I don't, I wasn't, I didn't have an affinity for big cities and big city life so much. And the only reason I was down there is because I worked in the oilfield, but I never was in Houston, so I never made any friends in Houston except one or two. And, you know, there were just no life there for me.

Tim Jones [00:11:56] So I came back to Austin and a fellow named Roger Baker. I don't know, you may be interviewing him. He is an active environmentalist and a transportation activist who has been active in Austin for a long time. And he's active to this day. He put me up and I got a job. Well, actually, yes, all right, after I lived in Austin, then a woman that I knew that I had known earlier, had a house and she was moving out of her place. It was over on Blanco Street. Yeah, and it was off Lamar. And she gave me this place she used to live. And so I made enough money with a friend to pay the rent.

Tim Jones [00:12:52] And I went out back down to Campbell's Hole, you know, upstream of Barton Springs, to see where we used to go. You know, the flutings. If you know anything about Barton Creek, you know, there's these grooves in the creek bottom that are, you know, three or four, maybe even five feet deep up upstream of Campbell's Hole itself. They're spectacular swimming places. Looks like you can dove right into the rocks, you know, and actually, there is a groove of, of fast-flowing water that you can swim down.

Tim Jones [00:13:32] Well, I went out there and I found that it wasn't the same town.

David Todd [00:13:37] Hey, Tim, could I just stop you right there? Your mike is in your luxuriant beard. There you go. Yeah, try to be careful to keep the two apart. That'd be great. Sorry to interrupt you. So you were tell me about going up to Campbell's Hole and the creek bottom.

Tim Jones [00:13:56] So, yeah, I went to Campbell's Hole. And I found that they had built the house right over it, immediately over Campbell's Hole. There is now a house, and there are houses strung all along the bluff on the east side of the creek. And there are actually

apartment buildings, condos, on the other side of the creek. The whole thing right above Barton Springs is covered up with development. This place that used to be a wild place, fantastic, beautiful place.

Tim Jones [00:14:25] And I thought it had been defiled by by all of this development. And I wrote a story about how we ought to get big giant slingshots and fill them full of balloons of camouflage paint and cover up all these. It was a whimsical little story that, that I wrote about camouflaging all these houses so that we could make Campbell's Hole natural again. And it was completely absurd. But it was funny.

Tim Jones [00:14:59] And this woman, Laurie Bilk, who had rented me the apartment I was living in, said that you should go talk to these people that think like you do. And I went down to a meeting of EarthFirst!, the Austin chapter, if you can call it that, of EarthFirst!. And that's when they actually were more focused on the Piney Woods and activism out there.

Tim Jones [00:15:37] I went out there once and it was like, "Well, what are we going to be doing out here?" I mean, it was a long way to go for one thing. There wasn't really anything happening that we could stop or whatever. And I didn't see the point of that actually, of, of engaging with, you know, a bunch of people that were making their living out there that way. And, and anyway, it didn't make sense to me.

Tim Jones [00:16:02] So we came back. And about that time, and I can't remember exactly how it happened, but a woman I know, Jackie Thomas. There were some, okay, we somehow got tipped off that there was an endangered species problem in Austin. I guess Jackie Thomas was on the Environmental Board. And anyway, she brought that to a meeting. And so we went out there and, and I got the group to focus on endangered species problems instead of the Piney Woods.

Tim Jones [00:16:50] And one day, George Avery said, "Okay, we have decided ..." He was a higher-up in the organization; he had been there for some years." He said, "Okay, we're going to focus on problems in Austin." And so we ...

Tim Jones [00:17:08] Right about at that time. This was in 1988. I was, I had, One of the ways I supplemented my income as a courier was to collect scrap metal. And I was taking some of that over to a salvage yard, going down the freeway, and a pipe blew out of my truck on the freeway at 32nd Street and I-35, and I couldn't leave it out in the road. It didn't seem right. It was a big copper pipe. And I turned on down the road and, and came back across the bridge at 32nd Street, and parked at the top of the hill. I went over and grabbed this pipe. I was coming back, and not seeing a car, the car didn't see me, I didn't see the car. Anyway, I got hit by this car. And it just drove right through me and broke both of my legs, flipped me over the car.

Tim Jones [00:18:09] And that's when life changed completely because I had two broken legs. I couldn't work. I was, I could collect SSI, Supplemental Social Security and Medicaid, you know, so I could heal up these broken legs. And I got a very small settlement. I don't know how I ever got a settlement. I hired a lawyer and he somehow, he settled with the people, some insurance company. It was totally my fault. I mean, I was out in the road. But he managed to settle for 10,000. I think I got 6700 bucks or something like that.

Tim Jones [00:18:54] Anyway, with that amount of money, and since I didn't need much money, I managed to pay the rent on the place. And we kept on looking at endangered species

issues, golden-cheeked warbler issues out in the, you know, around Four Points, 620 and 2222, out there in the Bull Creek area, and on the other side, and all through that place.

Tim Jones [00:19:27] And at, simultaneously, Jackie Thomas, being on the Environmental Board, was getting with a fellow named Chuck Sexton. He was a, he was a biologist for the City. And he gave her maps and things. And so that was how we got, got the information. And she would request information on the golden-cheeked, where golden-cheeks were found. And she would bring that to us.

Tim Jones [00:19:55] We would go out and groundtruth the place. And also, we found there were caves. And we started exploring for caves and found them too - caves and sinkholes and things out there on the Jollyville Plateau, it's called. And right when I was just getting started with that, to go back to the freeway, I got hit by this car and, you know, I got squashed. As I was healing up, I had nothing else to do but go out there on my crutches and, and bust through the brush looking for, for sinkholes and, and finding out if there were really golden-cheeked warblers out there or not, and like that.

Tim Jones [00:20:45] And you did ask about the vireo. EarthFirst! did some action on the vireo. It was out at Steiner Ranch. There was a demonstration. I wasn't part of that one. But it didn't come to much. We drew attention to the issue. But the vireo was a kind of already a foregone conclusion as being listed as endangered. There were other places on the west side of 620 that we had vireos, I think. But in my, under my purview or whatever, I wasn't very focused on them. I was very focused on on the golden-cheeked warbler, though, and so after ... and these caves.

Tim Jones [00:21:40] Everything was evolving because I was getting better. My legs were healing. I could be more active. And as I was, one day in, I guess, oh, at the end of 1989, Jackie Thomas took me to the hospital, to Brackenridge, to get metal taken out of my knee. I had a whole bunch of screws and plates and things, and there was some screw or something that was bothering me.

Tim Jones [00:22:11] And so she gave me a ride to the hospital. And on the way back I said, "You know, we have got to take care of the warbler. We've got to, we've got to do this because..." Oh, there's something I need to add. In this time, I was also working with a fellow named David Steed. I had gotten a job with him and it was to manage cowbird traps, brown-headed cowbirds. Very disagreeable job because you had to kill, kill, kill birds. But if you know what a brown-headed cowbird is, the females lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. And not only do they lay their eggs there, they destroy the eggs of the other bird. And one of those other birds is the golden-cheeked warbler.

Tim Jones [00:23:03] So the county had hired David Steed to manage these traps to catch cowbirds out in golden-cheeked warbler habitat. And so I had that job. One day, David Steed told me that, "Tim, if you're going to file for a listing, you need to be sure to use the word 'petition', 'that this is a petition'". Apparently, the Audubon Society had tried to get the warbler listed, failed to add that particular language, and the listing attempt failed.

Tim Jones [00:23:45] So, going back to our way back from the hospital after this minor surgery, we went over to a Kinko's and she, she could type and she started typing out this letter. We typed out an explanation of what was happening out at Four Points and how the impending development was going to take out some of the best golden-cheeked warbler

habitat in the world. Very tall juniper trees out there, and there were a lot of warblers out there.

Tim Jones [00:24:20] And so we typed this up. And then I added, I said, "This isn't good enough." And so I, I added some, some language at the end, handwritten language, at the end of the the petition, further explaining the situation and did add that, "Please consider this to be a petition". And it worked.

Tim Jones [00:24:49] Elisa Schull was the biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service. And anyway, she was very much in agreement that the warblers were under threat. And they, they allowed for the petition to succeed, and we got the emergency listing. And as soon as that happened, basically development in the, on the west side of Austin just stopped. Because people were going to have to get permits to continue, "take permits". And they weren't giving take permits because nobody knew what the situation was. So they had to study the warbler.

Tim Jones [00:25:33] And they collected a whole bunch of people too - city officials and county officials and others. They didn't like me very much because I was considered to be too radical, being an EarthFirster!, and one that didn't particularly feel compelled to abide by barbed wire fences and such restrictions on where we went. And they thought that I would you know, I would contribute to people having ill feelings against the warbler or whatever, I don't know.

Tim Jones [00:26:10] But anyway, I was left out of the, the paperwork aspect of creating a listing, a proper listing for the warbler, not the emergency listing I got. Then they filed all that, all the biologists and everybody else got together, got the listing. They created the Balcones Conservation Plan, "Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan", it's called. And put that together and that allowed for development, for developers to get permits, take permits, to develop land that had warblers on it.

Tim Jones [00:27:01] And we continued exploring places. Mainly, it kind of went from, after the warbler was listed, there wasn't much to do because it was listed. And we kind of focused on caves. And I found a, a bunch of caves. I don't know how many, maybe five or so sinkholes. And those caves are now stars on the Balcones Canyonlands map for endangered species spots, they are little stars. One of them is out at Lakeline Mall. There's a two-acre natural area out in the middle of the parking lot that's got that, that cave in it, a small cave in it. I used to call it, "Barbed Wire and Bed Springs Cave," because the ranchers in those days used to fill in sinkholes with something. In this particular one, they threw old bed springs and barbed wire in the cave so the cows and goats wouldn't fall in, mostly goats, I guess, wouldn't fall in and get trapped in the sinkhole.

Tim Jones [00:28:10] And there were others: one out at Jester Estates cave is one of those. It's out at the end of Jester Estates Boulevard, there's that cave. And, and others. And then other people, like Mark Sanders and everybody (he's a phenomenal caver). I wasn't much of a caver because my legs were kind of, you know, crapped out. But, he went out, and you should interview him, too. He, he's a phenomenal caver, used to be. He's kind of getting, he's getting old, too. But so we did that.

Tim Jones [00:28:51] And then, we went back to Barton Creek and we'd go down to Barton Creek from time to time anyway. And I went down Barton Creek and I went, I was, oh, just far upstream of, of Barton Springs and I noticed there was algae in the creek and, and like, you know, you kind of know that when you see cladophora algae in a creek like that, didn't even

know the name of it at the time. But that was an indication that something's wrong with this creek. I mean, this is an intermittent stream. There is, there was nobody was dumping sewerage into the creek. There wasn't anything that ... there wasn't very much development real close to the creek, except way down by Barton Springs, which indeed that development and because of the sewer lines down there right above Barton Springs did pollute the creek. And I've got that documented on my, an old website I've had called Ground Truth Investigations about how a stream above Barton Springs was polluted by leaking sewer line.

Tim Jones [00:30:04] Upstream, however, they hadn't built sewer lines in the creek. And, I found this algae bloom down there and it was below the golf courses for Barton Creek Properties, called Stratus now. And, at that time, Barton Creek Properties was applying for a planned unit development. They wanted to expand their, their development into this huge zone of houses and more golf courses and whatever. And we put two and two together and it looked, it became fairly certain that the, the application of treated effluent on the golf course, which is how they get rid of the effluent from development out in the Hill Country a lot, is to treat the effluent and then spray it on golf courses.

Tim Jones [00:31:10] Well, it wasn't supposed to get away from them, but it did. And I took that the, the discovery to the Planning Commission, Mary Arnold was chair of the Planning Commission, and said, "There is algae below Barton Creek Properties in Barton Creek. These people are polluting the creek. This has got to stop."

Tim Jones [00:31:34] And, a lot of people got wind of that and, that... You know, I don't know how it all happened because I know what I did. But a lot of people ... Bill Bunch was an EarthFirster! He, he got hold of it. Other people, again, got a hold of this. And what we did was we fought the planned unit development with that information that they were polluting the creek. And we actually killed their, their PUD, their planned unit development, at a city council meeting, an all-night meeting of city council, everybody and his brother came out there fighting for Barton Creek. And we succeeded.

Tim Jones [00:32:21] And that gave rise then to the S.O.S., the Save Our Springs Alliance. And it exists to this day of trying to protect Barton Springs and all of the springs and Hill Country streams from the effects of, of development, whether it be from development creating runoff, sediment runoff, into the streams and thereby messing with, you know, how fish and salamanders and whatever have spawning grounds. And if you put a bunch of sediment in the creek, it ruins how the fish can build nests and maintain their, their spawning habitat.

Tim Jones [00:33:16] And then there is the aspect of pollution from the runoff, from golf courses, that they hadn't managed to get under control. It's just not real easy to do. So you just can't do it in certain places.

Tim Jones [00:33:30] And so there were a bunch of different things I did just wandering around in Barton Creek and exploring Barton Creek. The highway department was building a highway 290. You know, it was expanding highway 290. And they were putting in water quality ponds. So I actually worked with the highway department in getting their water quality ponds right, or making them do it.

Tim Jones [00:33:58] One they had forgotten about: and it was Water Quality Pond Number two. It's, it's over by Brody Lane. And so we made sure that they put in that water quality pond, which is right above Barton Creek, so that runoff from the highway wouldn't be polluting the creek.

Tim Jones [00:34:17] And so I used to go out and I would look at water quality ponds to see if they were working or not. And quite often they failed. And, you know, they would leak one way or another. They weren't properly put in, or somebody would go down there and break some of the plastic underlayment of the sand filters, or one thing or another. They would fail and discharge polluted water into the stream.

Tim Jones [00:34:47] So, a lot of what I did was I would go out and look, look for things like that. And I always found something. If I went out and went to a creek where I knew there was a sewer line, I would find something, because it's just inevitable that if your development is around a stream, there's going to be pollution in that stream, because people don't really focus on, on the mitigation, best Management Practice, they call it - a water quality pond. They don't, they don't, they don't, they're not maintained correctly.

Tim Jones [00:35:19] And so that's what I did for, for some years. The community supported me. Save Barton Creek Association people, my friends, everybody gave me gas money and I would go out and that's what I did was inspect something. I called it Groundtruth Investigations.

Tim Jones [00:35:41] And I was on the Environmental Board. So I had been appointed to the Environmental Board, oh, well, maybe 1992, something like that. So I was on for 13 years, so I got off in 2003. So I guess in 1990, I was appointed to the Environmental Board. And I used to take the information. It was really great because, being an officer of the Environmental Board, I could get away with trespassing. Not always, but quite often I could go places that, you know, they had to kind of allow somebody or not make too big a wave, because if they did, I would bring the press on them. The Austin-American Statesman or somebody, and I'd say, "These guys are messing with the creek. And they didn't want bad publicity. So I could do what I wanted to do, until the end, when Barton Creek Properties finally got me.

Tim Jones [00:36:43] Anyway, as an officer of the Environmental Board, I would take the information that I found and translate that into the rules, in how you had to, you know, and well, I wasn't the only one. I mean, the whole city staff was all focused on that. So there were a bunch of people doing this, and I would do what I would do. I would bring city staff to places, and then we would get together and form the rules. But being an independent inspector and then being on the Board and having contact with city staff, because of that, we got a pretty good set of rules on how developers had to proceed.

Tim Jones [00:37:32] I also worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service. A fellow named Matt Lechner was doing the conservation studies for, for the Barton Springs Salamander. And after it was listed, because of all these things, we had fine, huge efforts by Bill Bunch and, you know, everybody, a whole lot of people, not just EarthFirsters!. They, as part of the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan, an amendment to that, I guess it was an amendment to it, because the Barton Springs issue. I don't remember how exactly that came together, but Barton, the Barton Creek area, is designated that, those, those wild lands are designated not only for the Barton Creek salamander, but also for the golden-cheeked warbler. And so it's expanded.

Tim Jones [00:38:32] That whole valley, as much green space as you have out there, is derived from the action to protect the warbler and the salamander. And that's why we have so much green space in Austin, is because EarthFirsters! got out there and, and then we brought the whole community in on things. We would discover things, and the community would

become alarmed, and then things would happen. And so we have the Balcones Conservation Plan, which is a phenomenal conservation plan, spectacular, probably the best in the country. So those are the various elements.

Tim Jones [00:39:22] And, and so I did that until about, or was active that way until about 2003. In 2003, I got mad at the chair of the Board because of the way a certain decision was handed to city staff. And I was fed up with having him change the decisions of the Board and behind our back. And I resigned. I said, "I can't deal with this. There's no point in being on this Board, and making things happen. And then the chair of the Board goes behind our backs and lays down the decision according to how he feels about it." Lee Leffingwell: he became mayor. And since he was more of a conservationist than whoever his opponent was, I didn't make much of a stink about it. I probably should have, but I didn't. And then he became mayor. I don't know if it made any difference or not, but he did. And I, I left the board.

Tim Jones [00:40:25] But, but the real kind of reason that I did was because it stopped raining in 2003 and a little earlier. But about that time, the way that you find violations from, from runoff from developed areas, whether it's sediment, or golf courses, or whatever, is when you have a lot of rain and it washes whatever that's up there down into the creek, when that doesn't happen, there's nothing to do. Nobody's violating. You know, there's, there's no problem.

Tim Jones [00:41:02] And so in 2003 that issue with the Board, and then the fact that it stopped raining. And I, I was ... Okay, just, there's another element in this. It didn't really affect what happened. But in in 2000 or 1999, I was arrested by the sheriff's department at Barton Creek Properties. I went over a fence. It's over on the Southwest Parkway. And I was looking at a project by the City to expand a water line. And they had dug up this water line, hit it, rained in it, washed a bunch of sediment under the Southwest Parkway over onto Barton Creek Properties, and it was washing down into Travis Country, where there are known sinkholes and recharge features in the creek bottoms.

Tim Jones [00:42:01] And so I got into an argument with an engineer who said, "No, the pollution that's going down there is not from us. It's from these other guys." And I said, "No, it's you. And so I'll prove it."

Tim Jones [00:42:11] I had a video camera. I hopped over the fence. I went down to, to where the water that was running under the freeway met the water that was coming down along side. What, I'm like blanking out ... Southwest Parkway. And I was, I videotaped where the plume of sediment was coming, and clear water coming off Barton Creek Properties. So I thought, "Well, you know, I just made a case on these guys the week before. Here's a place where I'm going to show that Barton Creek Properties isn't the bad guys. It's the City was doing, not, not properly doing their erosion control."

Tim Jones [00:42:54] Well, the Barton Creek Property came out there anyway and had me arrested. I wasn't actually arrested. They said that, I don't know, I had some issues and they said, "Well, if you'll just come down and turn yourself in, we'll book you or something and, and turn you loose."

Tim Jones [00:43:14] And that's what they did. I wasn't even arrested. But, I was charged with a Class C misdemeanor, trespassing. Going over this barbed wire fence to actually vindicate Barton Creek Properties, and they busted me for it anyway.

Tim Jones [00:43:35] We had a trial, a five-day trial. Finally, after I'd talked to a lawyer and they'd found big, huge issues. Well, just to follow through: some long time, it takes forever for justice to work its way through the process. They had a five-day trial for my little crossing the barbed wire fence out in the boondocks violation. And I plead a public duty defense because I was an officer of the Environmental Board. I was looking at pollution by the City. And, you know, I didn't tell anybody that I was going to cross this barbed wire fence. It didn't make any real difference because it was just, I crossed into private property. Even if it's out in the boondocks, you're violating. You know, you're, you're liable for that.

Tim Jones [00:44:37] So they were going to get me. And so they had a trial. I had a public duty defense. Everybody thought that I had won that public duty defense because of what I was doing. There wasn't any other reason I would be out there doing that than as a public duty.

Tim Jones [00:44:58] And the jury went back and found me guilty anyway. And it was because we found out later that one of them said, "You know, we like what you're doing, but we don't want people like you in our back yard."

Tim Jones [00:45:14] So the public duty defense went down. I was found guilty. I, they were going to give me probation and all this stuff. And I stood up in the court and I said, "I'm not taking probation. Stick me in jail and really piss me off."

Tim Jones [00:45:34] And Craig Smith, my lawyer said, "Well, we don't want anything dire happening and you should make the correct decision or whatever, blah, blah, blah."

Tim Jones [00:45:46] And the other lawyer I had was totally perfunctory, "Blah blah blah." David Reynolds. And Useless.

Tim Jones [00:45:54] And the, the jury went back and came back and said, "We're going to find you \$30." \$30. And, you know, somebody paid the \$30 and I went free.

Tim Jones [00:46:17] So it was it was a mixed victory. You know, I lost and I won at the same time. There were people that testified at the trial one day, Craig Smith thought back and said, "Wow, it's like going to your own funeral." And that's pretty funny.

Tim Jones [00:46:36] But there was that, and that issue of with the Class B misdemeanor trespassing, I, I wasn't as comfortable crossing a barbed wire fence again. And that's how three years later I finally, because of it stopped raining, and because of that, and because of the Lee Leffingwell issue, I got off the Environmental Board.

Tim Jones [00:47:02] When I got off the Environmental Board, and at the same time the developers came after Matt Lechner with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and they found little nitpicky things he'd not done right or something. Anyway, he was constantly being hammered by developers for decisions because he was the hammer, he was the, he was the bad guy, as far as he was concerned. I was, you know ... they were after both of us. But they got him, too. And he finally gave, just quit. He resigned from the Fish and Wildlife Service and got a job with the Forest Service and moved to southern Illinois.

Tim Jones [00:47:44] That's how tense it was between the EarthFirst! And the Fish and Wildlife Service and people enforcing the laws and the development community. They were going to come in and rape Austin. There wasn't anything that was going to stop them. And you can see what we have now.

Tim Jones [00:48:00] But one of the things we do have now is a whole bunch of open space that wouldn't have been there if it hadn't been for EarthFirst!, I guarantee you.

Tim Jones [00:48:11] So, in 2003, I started coming out here to what we call Waterstone. Jenny Clarke bought some land out on the Blanco River and - fantastic swimming hole on the Blanco - one of the best spots on the river. And she focused on protecting wildlife, particularly birds. And we've been here ever since.

Tim Jones [00:48:47] And we added more land one way or another. You know, there was a place across the road that, a big pasture and then some woodland above that. The owners ... well, Jenny, the community out here was afraid that they were going to develop it. And so everybody was scared that developers were going to come in and buy all that. And we were going to have another. We were going to be surrounded by a subdivision.

Tim Jones [00:49:23] So Jenny mentioned it to the landowner. She came back a couple of weeks later, ten days maybe, and said, "Well, we decided we would like to sell that land." And so, Jenny cut a deal, just, just, you know, cash on the barrelhead, basically, and bought that land.

Tim Jones [00:49:43] And then a fellow that owned land next to us passed away. He, he overdosed on a medication. And he passed away. And so another 45 acres was, we acquired. So now the original 50 acres of Waterstone is now 155 acres. And then she actually acquired another house.

Tim Jones [00:50:07] So anyway, it's, we have a big stretch of land out here on the Blanco that we manage for wildlife, and it's pretty hyper-managed because we feed a lot of animals.

Tim Jones [00:50:20] As you were picking up on earlier with us, you know, feeding the foxes and having to run off the buzzard and everybody, we kind of, well, I have my, my animals. And so that's what we do. And hope for the best. Hope the warblers will come back. And we did, but Jenny saw one the other day, and I saw a female the other day. So apparently we may have had a nesting success. I don't know, because I also found a brown-headed cowbird out here. So I don't know what happened. And I can't hear them anymore because I'm getting old and I just can't hear warblers very well anymore. So I don't really know if they succeeded or not. Nobody does. But that's pretty much the story.

David Todd [00:51:14] Well, Tim, this is, this is great stuff. Thank you so much for walking us through this.

David Todd [00:51:23] I was wondering if we could ask you some questions. You know, not so much about, you know, the particular events, but maybe some of the thoughts that you had.

David Todd [00:51:37] You know, one of the things that I'm always intrigued by is, is whether there were people in your school or in your family who encouraged your interest in the outdoors. And I think you said that you, you know, had some pretty solitary years there. But is there anybody that might have led you or encourage you to be interested in the outdoors?

Tim Jones [00:52:06] No, my father, you know, yeah, my parents, you know, they used to take us on vacations up to the mountains. He'd get 30 days' vacation. We'd go out and far away from civilization as we could get. And they encouraged me to. I mean, nobody focused me on

doing anything. We went out to play out in the wild land, you know, and go fishing and stuff like that.

Tim Jones [00:52:29] I was never focused on becoming an environmentalist. I never studied that. I studied at first, I, uh, I was going to get a degree in geology at the University of Kansas, and I got sick during final week. I failed a calculus exam. That threw off my whole curriculum in getting a degree in geology, because I was going to have to go back and study calculus. And I just, I started losing interest in it. And I just said, I want to study something I don't know.

Tim Jones [00:53:09] So, I came down to the University of Texas and started studying government. Well, there were a lot of things happening in the world that I wanted to have an understanding of, like a war in Vietnam. And why are we going to war? And why the hell am I not? And. So that's what I got a degree in was government.

Tim Jones [00:53:34] Finally, I didn't even get the degree when I was supposed to Iowa. I got hit by that car. And oh, no, I dropped out in 1964. I had 6 hours to go and I dropped out because of the hippie revolution and all the psychedelic drugs and all this kind of stuff that we were into. And I, then, when I got hit by this car and got, was healing, I went back to the university. Let me think. Why did? No, that, not the thing in '80. I had another accident, a horrible accident, a motorcycle accident. That's what it was. I got hit by a car on a motorcycle. That was my first broken leg. And I, and I don't remember, 1969, I guess. And as I was healing up from that, I went back to the University of Texas, got my degree, and in government. And so I have a degree in government from U.T.

Tim Jones [00:54:50] It didn't have anything to do with the environment. Absolutely nothing. And, and no, I got interested in the environment because of what the developers were doing to our natural places. And the more natural places I went to and found what developers were doing to them, the more focused I got in undoing what they were doing, however I could. And that's what it was, because, you know, it's land rape. You know, you got to stop the criminals. And that's what we did. That's what it was about, was stopping the bad guys.

David Todd [00:55:37] OK.

David Todd [00:55:39] Well, something else that we try to ask everybody and sometimes it's relevant and sometimes it's, it's not terribly significant. But, you know, for some people, there's a book or a film or a TV show or something out in the popular media world that is really influential for them - something they saw or read that just inspired them to get involved in environmental work. And I was curious if there was anything like that you can think of?

Tim Jones [00:56:11] No. It was experience.

David Todd [00:56:13] OK.

Tim Jones [00:56:14] Not. I'm sorry. I wish I could say that there was some, some book that focused me, but no.

David Todd [00:56:24] OK.

Tim Jones [00:56:24] It was, what got me doing was... Well, I sound like I'm bragging or something, you know. There were people that wanted me to create an environmental company focused on erosion control and stuff like that. And I said, "Look, this stuff is just

common sense." And I can't remember his name, but he turned around and said, "It's uncommon sense." And that's what it was.

Tim Jones [00:57:07] I have the ability to see things, or behind things, or to put two and two together, you know, on, on the level that I'm on. I mean, there are people that, you know, create rockets. I can't do that. But what I can do is I can see how the earth operates, kind of. And, and I study that. And, and then that's, that's it, you know. You just see things and then you find out what, what, why it's happening. And so I have a talent for that. And so that's, that's what I did. That's what I do.

David Todd [00:57:53] OK.

David Todd [00:57:53] Well, you know, something else I think is really intriguing about your life, and you know how you first, maybe in the early days, got engaged and that's through EarthFirst! And, you know, EarthFirst!, in my mind at least, kind of stands out as, as an unusual group. There are a lot of environmental groups that, you know, they, they lobby and they organize. They, they advocate and they do things with telephones and pieces of paper. But EarthFirst! seems different.

Tim Jones [00:58:32] Direct action.

David Todd [00:58:33] And I'm curious how you see EarthFirst!'s work and why that seemed like the right niche for you. And, you know, how EarthFirst! fits into the whole ecosystem of conservation groups.

Tim Jones [00:58:48] To be an EarthFirst!er, it's a way of life. I mean, it's dangerous. I mean, a real EarthFirst!er, in the first place, you don't even know who real EarthFirst!ers are, you know. We're discovered. And, but they're out everywhere and they're doing things to make the earth a better place. But there's every level of EarthFirst!er From the guy that you'll never know, is that guy, to the guys like Dave Foreman, you know, that got set up and busted for trying to bomb power lines from a nuclear power plant or something.

Tim Jones [00:59:25] You know, there's a lot of EarthFirst! these days is advocacy and a lot of it is basically drawing attention to things through demonstration, locking themselves to trees and bulldozers, one thing or another, to draw attention to something so that others, like the Sierra Club or the Audubon Society or somebody like that who have organized, S.O.S., who have organizing skills and can bring public attention to something, raise an outcry, get money to hire lobbyists and lawyers and make things happen that way.

Tim Jones [01:00:12] The EarthFirst!ers are kind of the tip of the spear, as it were. They will go out often and stop things, you know. And some of it's, well, there are very many of us out there doing real EarthFirst! work because it's so dangerous. I mean, they're making laws against us right and left, and even against what would anybody does, locking themselves on to something associated with an oil or gas pipeline or something like that. I mean, those are horrendous penalties for doing stuff like that now. You just, most major EarthFirst!ers have gotten into publishing and, or being songwriters or that kind of thing.

Tim Jones [01:01:03] And, you know, I mean, you can only do so much before you're busted like I was busted. How many times can you stand that, you know, before you have a record, and then it piles up and, and, and then you're in jail. And what can you do from jail? Nothing. So you don't want to go there.

Tim Jones [01:01:21] So, I don't know. EarthFirst!ers, like I say, you don't know EarthFirst!ers anymore, very many - old ones like me. But I don't do anything wrong. I mean, I don't, I don't. I've got my hands full trying to do the right thing as opposed to trespassing and locking yourselves onto bulldozers and stuff like that. It's just not, it's too risky these days for most of us. It's still done, maybe once or twice. And, and more scientists are getting involved in something like that, locking themselves to the, to the gate around, the fence around the White House. I mean, there's a lot of, of real serious work being done by, by people.

Tim Jones [01:02:09] I don't know. Where am I going with this? What was the question?

David Todd [01:02:12] No, no, that's, that's really responsive. That's very helpful.

David Todd [01:02:17] So, another question that occurs to me and you know, this may be going back over things that you said before, but I think it's really worth emphasizing. I know very few people like you who've been first-person observers and witnesses and, you know, the sort of groundtruth documentarian, to go out and see what's happening on, on the land, you know, whether it's cutting down junipers or allowing sediment to go into creeks and sinkholes.

Tim Jones [01:02:53] Nobody's got the time, nobody's got the time to do that independently. The only way that you can do that kind of thing is to get a job working for a city, or the Fish and Wildlife Service, or the Forest Service or, you know, as a, you could go out and get a degree in biology or forestry or whatever, and then you get a job with the city, and then you're constrained by all the rules and regulations and you try to do the best you can. That's how you see things. Very, very few people have the time.

Tim Jones [01:03:31] And the only way you can get there is to have some catastrophic event happen, like getting squashed by a car where, and you live a frugal life. You, you don't have any money. You have enough to live. And the community, there are not, there are not very many of us.

Tim Jones [01:03:56] You have stars out there. I mean, people that go out and have degrees and, and go out to Africa or one place or another, you know, and study things. But that's, you either do it that way, or you have something happen to where you're just turned loose and you can do it on another level, like the level I was.

Tim Jones [01:04:21] I didn't study anything. Mine was OJT from the get-go. And it was, it was simply that I wanted to protect the land.

David Todd [01:04:37] Yeah. You know, and earlier you were talking about some of your groundtruthing work and you mentioned this, this project, I think it was called Four Points. There was a PUD that had been proposed by H. Ross Perot.

Tim Jones [01:04:59] Right.

David Todd [01:05:00] And, and I think that you had had done some exposé work there. And I was curious if you could just sort of go through that as kind of an example of the groundtruthing that you were doing.

Tim Jones [01:05:16] Well, H. Ross Perot bought Four Points is... All right, the Jollyville Plateau is that area above Lake Travis and Lake Austin and Bull Creek. It's that, that dissected plateau. It's a remnant plateau. And it's what's left after the erosion that caused Bull Creek and the Colorado River and its tributaries. And on that place, you have an oak - juniper woodland. And it's also, it has a layer of limestone. I can't think of the names here. The, I can't think of the formation names. Anyway, there's a thick, well, about a 20-foot layer of limestone before you hit a layer of marl, and then other series of Glen Rose limestone. There's the Edwards limestone overlies.

Tim Jones [01:06:43] Okay. That limestone is karst. It's very heavily dissected by, by infiltrating water. And so you get a lot of sinkholes and caves. Well, below that, you have what's called a lower confining bed. And so you have all these springs that come out under that 20 or so feet of limestone and flow through then what's called the Glen Rose limestone, a different kind of limestone because it's layers of shale and limestone and you have creeks that, that flow and then lose, and then come back, and so you have a different kind of thing than you do in the Edwards, which is, has a lot of just vertical dissolution and water comes straight through.

Tim Jones [01:07:35] Well in those, in those places, in that limestone, you have a conflation of a fantastic habitat for golden-cheeked warblers and other neotropical passerines and the Jollyville salamander. And so, there's a lot of springs there and it's just a very interesting place, incredible. Because you have all these springs.

Tim Jones [01:08:13] And it was also, since it was such high ground up above the river, the Indians, the Native Americans, lived there and formed Indian middens at the headwaters of all of the, the springs, so adjacent to the springs. And I'd say all of them you have Indian middens and a record of people being there.

Tim Jones [01:08:38] So people wanted to be there, from time immemorial. People liked that place.

Tim Jones [01:08:44] And so we were, you know, it was some place to, to keep it that way, if you could.

Tim Jones [01:08:52] And then, you know, the looters came in and tore apart all the middens, you know. And so what's left to them, if there's anything left of them. I had to stop going because I couldn't stand it. I mean, the way that they were raping the place, you know, looking for arrowheads and stuff, they just destroyed the headwaters of the streams.

Tim Jones [01:09:10] And then the developers were, you know, building roads. And so then you got all the erosion going down, you know, and crapping out the streams.

Tim Jones [01:09:20] We protected what we could. We got a pretty good deal going in the Jollyville Plateau area. We have, what do you call it? Still Creek, not Shoal Creek. What is it, Jenny?

Tim Jones [01:09:41] Anyway, you have a big basin. I'm blanking out on the name, and that's a stupid thing.

David Todd [01:09:51] Wild Basin?

Tim Jones [01:09:51] Well, no, Wild Basin is further over it.

Tim Jones [01:09:57] Anyway, it's the stream that goes, crosses under Loop 360 and 2222 - Bull Creek, for Christ's sake. Yes, the Bull Creek area is a very fantastic place. The headwaters of Bull Creek is Jollyville Plateau.

Tim Jones [01:10:20] Jester Estates was going to come through that. And we stopped that. We stopped kind of the edge of Jester Estates by finding that cave. And we found others. We couldn't stop them all. There were big inroads into it, where developers got it. They had old ranches and stuff like that. And so things were grandfathered, you know, old applications, one thing or another.

Tim Jones [01:10:40] But a lot of it we did protect.

Tim Jones [01:10:44] And so how do you, how could you explain stopping Perot's PUD at Four Points? I understand that part of it was tied to these concerns about the warblers. Is that right?

Tim Jones [01:10:59] Yes, absolutely. Four Points has the densest warbler habitat anywhere in the world. It had these, it had the streams. It had springs of clean water that went down into the Bull Creek, you know, watershed. And so you had this whole basin and on both sides, you know, the other creeks came down from the other sides of the Jollyville Plateau and I haven't been there in so many years, I can't just name those off the top of my head, but all those streams were places where you had clean water, and birds want clean water.

Tim Jones [01:11:43] And so what you had was the kind of trees they like to make nests out of, which are juniper trees. You had a mix of all kinds of other vegetation. You had Texas oaks. You have a whole series of different trees that bloom at different times, that have an insect population that, that helps with their pollination and that just also used them as forage plants. So so you have a, a series, a whole panoply of different trees that, that blossom or leaf and things at different times which have insect populations at different times. And you have clean water.

Tim Jones [01:12:35] And, and there you have where birds like golden-cheeked warblers want to go. That's where they go, where they have the food so they can raise their babies through the time it takes for them to nest as well as fledge. So you got about, what, six weeks there. So, you know, and they may nest twice. So it may be a couple of months that, that, or longer, that the warblers inhabit that. But, but it's where you have the food and the water, just like everybody else. And, and that's where the warblers go.

Tim Jones [01:13:13] And Four Points being up there on the Jollyville Plateau like that was perfect, because it had, it had such an agreeable habitat, best in the world for a warbler, or for a lot of birds. It's just, you know.

Tim Jones [01:13:30] But people like it, too, because it's the high ground, you know. So they built: that's what Four Points is. That's why those roads - 2222 and 620 - are there. They are old Indian trails that go on the high ground. That's the high ground and up there on the plateau.

Tim Jones [01:13:48] And that's where H. Ross Perot wanted to build his big development right there in that corner, and we had to stop him. And we did.

David Todd [01:13:57] How did that happen?

Tim Jones [01:13:58] How did, how did we stop him?

David Todd [01:14:02] Yeah.

Tim Jones [01:14:03] We got to a listing. We listed the golden-cheeked warbler. That's what it was all about.

David Todd [01:14:10] And so the evidence that you brought in was was from some of your documentary video?

Tim Jones [01:14:18] Yes. Chuck Sexton, oh, and there's others whose names I can't think of, that precede him. Uh, can't think of his name.

Tim Jones [01:14:32] You see, developers in the ETJ of Austin have to submit a site plan to the City for what they're going to do. When they submit a site plan, part of it is, is what does this environment hold out there? What's the nature of the streams and this and that? And what are you doing to keep the creek from being polluted and these various things?

Tim Jones [01:15:00] The warbler and the vireo were species of concern at the time. And there were a lot of people studying, excuse me, studying them. Boy, I wish I could help you a lot better if I knew the names, if I could remember the names of, of the people that were doing that hard work before we came along, because there were a number of biologists that, that were doing that nitty-gritty groundtruthing of the warblers and stuff like that. There were biologists that were studying these things.

Tim Jones [01:15:33] And so we had information that, and the City had information that, that this was happening out there. They just didn't have a way to make that information be strong enough to stop somebody from ruining that habitat. And that's where we fit in.

Tim Jones [01:16:01] Like I say, Jackie Thomas, we got her, she got herself, whatever, on the Environmental Board, got information from Chuck Sexton. Chuck Sexton gave her information.

Tim Jones [01:16:12] It really pissed off the developers. But he gave them, he gave her the information. She gave it to us. We knew where to go then. We knew what the land looked like. We had maps, we had contour maps, we had circles and arrows, and where the warblers had been spotted - all of it.

Tim Jones [01:16:31] You know, we went there, found out. Yep, that's true. And once we determined all that and made it, you know, because the City had all that information and we had groundtruth information, we wrote that petition. We groundtruthed it, verified what it was, and filed a petition that Four Points is going to destroy prime habitat for the warbler, the best habitat for the warbler in the world.

Tim Jones [01:17:03] That and Water Treatment Plant Number 4, was also going to do it. And that was a city thing that was out there. And we got it moved too. It's moved completely cattycorner on the other side of 2222 and 620. So, so that land has been protected.

Tim Jones [01:17:23] But yeah, we saw what was happening out there. And, and so it was a lot of people that did it. It's just that...

Tim Jones [01:17:35] David Steed was a key to the whole thing. He died a couple of years ago now. But him just telling me, "You got to say that word, one word." And it was just the timing, and the language, and the veracity of what we were doing because we were using information that the City had. I mean, there wasn't any disputing that. It was the developers hiring these consultants that gave them, that created that information. And so when, yes, so we used that information, put it all together and said, hey, this is going to be bad for the warbler if this guy gets away with it and all the rest. There's not going to be any habitat, significant habitat, left because they're coming fast. And they were.

Tim Jones [01:18:31] The Savings & Loan debacle was what killed development for a long time. You remember the Savings & Loan crisis? And that was before my time that that that really all happened. But the Savings & Loans, they, they, they lent out all this money and then it collapsed, remember?

David Todd [01:18:54] Sure. And it ended up in the RTC. Sure.

Tim Jones [01:18:57] Right. And so that gave us this window between when the, before development could start happening again. And we, just a miracle kind of, that, that we happened in at that time. We just, it was, I don't know.

David Todd [01:19:15] That's interesting. So maybe the, the collapse of the Savings & Loan Associations gave a little extra time to, to save some of this land from development.

David Todd [01:19:26] Well, let me ask you something else that I'm sort of intrigued by. You mentioned that the listing led to the, the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan, and in turn to these protected lands. And I'm curious about your, your view about these sort of trade-offs, you know, these bargains, deals between issuing permits for development and using that money that's raised from issuing those permits to in turn fund the preserves, you know, the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.

Tim Jones [01:20:11] Got to do it some way.

David Todd [01:20:11] Yeah. What is your view about that? I mean, it seems like a pragmatic way to do it. But do you, do you feel like it's, it's proper, ethical? What's your view of it? You've been in the trenches for a long time.

Tim Jones [01:20:26] Actually, I've never thought about it, to tell you the truth. You got to pay for things and you can't, it's pretty hard to just take land. Well, you know what they're doing? They're trying to delist the warbler now, and they probably will. They'll probably get away with it.

Tim Jones [01:20:45] You know, I don't know, because we've got such idiots now on the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Tim Jones [01:20:51] We've got people like, like Lisa O'Donnell. You should you know, she is a real trooper. You should talk to her sometime if you want the names, and the facts and figures, you should talk to Lisa O'Donnell with the City. She is, she's fighting to this day, she

and Mark Sanders and others. But Lisa O'Donnell is, is a linchpin in the effort to, to protect the warbler. And she works for the City and she's getting old. You should talk to her.

David Todd [01:21:21] Okay. Well, I will certainly make an effort there. Well so.

Tim Jones [01:21:26] She is really doing a lot of stuff, Lisa O'Donnell.

David Todd [01:21:32] So another thing I wanted to ask you about. You know, not only were you shooting this video and documenting what you're seeing out in the watershed, but, but you were making sure that it got seen. And I was interested in, in hearing your view of, of getting these videos on Austin Community Access TV. How did that come about, and what was your thinking behind doing that?

Tim Jones [01:22:04] Well, I left, left that out completely, didn't I?

Tim Jones [01:22:07] What happened was that, that, at first, I was just, I was shooting stuff with a film camera. Boy, what a hassle. And I was documenting streams and one thing or another. And I've got a pile of photographs, or a good record, I guess, of, of what those places used to look like. But it's not very effective. Wasn't very effective at all because a film camera, what do you do with it? You know, you've got these pictures. Then what? What do you do with a picture back in 1990? Nothing. I mean, what can you do with it?

Tim Jones [01:22:54] So, what happened was... how did I get that first camera? I don't remember. I don't remember. There was... Somebody got me a video camera and. It was when I could make a video that, then I could document things that were happening. You know, it wasn't just a photograph of something. It was an occasion, as it were. You know, you could do a panorama. You could, you could walk over places. And I had a small camera that, or a video camera, that I documented things on, on, just not even hi8 tape, it was just eight millimeter. And, I do not, I'm blanking out on how that how I got that first camera. Somebody must have given me a camera or something, but, but I used that.

Tim Jones [01:24:04] And one day I was out on Southwest Parkway area with another man whose name I can't remember. Damn it. He was a lawyer and we were, we were talking about weapons or something. We were talking about, I don't remember, about things, tools that you could use to get your point across. And I held up a camera and I said, "This is the best weapon you'll ever get." And I held up a video camera. And I said, "I need a better one." And he said, "Come to the house. I'll cut you a check."

Tim Jones [01:24:57] And oh, boy, I wish I could remember his name. He's a great man. He was a great, a good lawyer.

Tim Jones [01:25:06] And he did. And I bought a hi-8 camera, the best you could get, and started making tapes of water quality ponds and sewerage leaks and sediment runoff and all these things.

Tim Jones [01:25:25] And so, Jenny Clark, what would happen is that I had the camera and then I'd get somebody to run the camera for me. Jenny Clark was one of them, and others too, to run the camera. And I would talk, I would explain things on camera. And what it would, what I would do. Well, okay, that is how it first started. And I would have tapes.

Tim Jones [01:25:54] But again, what do you do with a tape? Very difficult to make it actionable. And, but I recorded all these things. And I could prove everything I had to say because it was on tape. So that was a good start.

Tim Jones [01:26:09] Then that camera also made photographs, you know, these little tiny photographs. And I found out, well, and then we got the Internet in 2000. Right? And suddenly you could take a digital picture and send that picture to the City staff or the City Council, mayor or anybody you wanted to, the Legislature.

Tim Jones [01:26:45] And suddenly you had power because you could take a picture of an event, of a situation, and you could give it to people electronically. It changed everything because then we became very powerful. That's, that's where my power was generated, was, was the ability to document things and share that documentation.

Tim Jones [01:27:11] And I even went to the Legislature one day, and I was sitting in a committee meeting and I was looking at somebody. It was almost a mystical experience. But, but one of these committee members looked at me and I don't know how that happened, but he looked at me and it was like just pure mind or something. But he looked at me and it was like, "Yes, but we have the power." And I held up my camera and I said, "So do I." And he said, "You do." And I don't think it was in words. I think it was, it was mind. And, but that was that was true.

Tim Jones [01:27:59] And so that's, that's what I did. After that, I had a camera all the time. People would follow me around with a camera or I'd, finally people got tired of following me around, and I'd carry the camera and just talk into it while I was looking at things.

Tim Jones [01:28:12] And there were, and we were making TV programs. Jenny Clark was one of the people that followed me around a lot, and, and, and recorded things. And, and then she was a producer, so she turned them into TV shows. And that's, that's how that got started. It was the groundtruth stuff. She would, we'd have our explanations, explorations and we would, well we would just have a certain place that we went and make a half-hour's worth of investigation or something like that. Or maybe, you know, a few hours' worth, condensed into a half an hour. And she would she would do that.

Tim Jones [01:28:56] And it was just kind of interesting stuff, just about, you know, how does a water quality pond work? How does it fail? You know, where does the water go? Where does it come from? Who does it come from? You know. And where does it go? And what happens?

Tim Jones [01:29:11] And, and so we did shows like that, a bunch of them. And people found it interesting, you know, because it was nitty-gritty. It was the groundtruth.

Tim Jones [01:29:23] And, I don't. So she made them and we did it. I think we created 13 of those. And finally, like I say, up to about 2003. And then everything just stopped raining, stopped raining, stopped, things stopped happening. Besides, I'd already been everywhere that there was to go. You know, it became repetitious. And, you know, we'd fixed them and they got fixed. And if they didn't, well, we'd fix them again, but.

David Todd [01:29:59] Well, so a related question, Tim.

Tim Jones [01:30:02] Let me finish this.

David Todd [01:30:03] I'm sorry. I apologize. Please continue.

Tim Jones [01:30:06] Jenny Clarke created them. They aired on ACTV, Austin Community Television. And for some reason, well, they aired and there was five years. They went for five years. Couldn't believe it. And then they re-ran for another five years. And because somebody liked them and that was something that ACTV could play and there was demand for them, I guess. I don't know. But they did.

Tim Jones [01:30:36] Finally, what happened was that ACTV went digital. There were just things and everything kind of stopped. A whole bunch of things just stopped and we stopped making things. Besides, there was just no place left to go that we hadn't covered. A lot of it was, you know.

Tim Jones [01:30:52] I had, I made TV shows that I had to withdraw because the developers say, "No, it wasn't us, it was somebody else." After I'd made a whole TV show, I had to run down there and stop it from being aired because it looked like I'd made a big mistake and, and accused the wrong people.

Tim Jones [01:31:08] And now when I go back and think about it, I think that they got me. I think they got the rancher to lie, is what I think happened. He said he polluted it with fertilizer that he threw in, didn't come from golf course. It was him. I'm almost certain now that it was a lie. Maybe it wasn't.

Tim Jones [01:31:23] But anyway, that, that was another thing that stopped me was that the developers got hip to what I was doing and they, they are such devils. I went down once and down into Barton Creek and I was going to, I took the City down there and the Austin American-Statesman to show them this algae bloom and the, the Barton Creek people had gone down there and gotten all these people to pull all the algae up, out of the river. They'd literally gone down with rakes and raked up all the algae in a whole stretch of stream. Big long stretch of stream. Just removed it, physically removed it.

Tim Jones [01:32:08] And so they made me look like a liar. Until I went upstream past where they were doing it. Then there was all this algae again. But yeah, they were devils. They did everything they could to stop me.

Tim Jones [01:32:22] Well, let me ask you one thing, sort of as a follow up. This, these programs that you created and broadcast on ACTV, I understand that those videos, and maybe still images as well, are archived at the Austin History Center. And.

Tim Jones [01:32:42] Yeah.

David Todd [01:32:42] And I'm curious why you went to that end, to store those and archive them. What sort of long-term impact do you think these, these images might have?

Tim Jones [01:32:56] I don't know. They're kind of unique, you know. They're, I don't know, they're, they're just a piece of history of the environmental movement in, in Austin and how that we made things happen, you know.

Tim Jones [01:33:11] It was just a way that, that Jenny wanted to preserve it. She, and she did. She preserved a lot of her stuff. All of the TV shows that she, that she made her are part of the History Center. So she just wanted to keep that record alive, let it go somewhere, not die.

You know, a lot of things just die. They may die anyway, you know, because they're on, on videotape.

Tim Jones [01:33:40] And I think she's actually digitized them or gotten somebody down there to digitize that stuff. But that dies too. So, who knows? But anyway, we saved it for as long as we could.

David Todd [01:33:52] Sure. Well, so I had just maybe a couple other questions if, if you could just spare a little bit more time.

David Todd [01:34:01] You know, the idea of, of archiving this material at the Austin History Center makes me think about how you might sum up the role of all this work you did, whether it was in the direct action or the groundtruthing. When you sort of have that historical perspective, and you're looking back 30, 40 years. And, and I'm curious, what do you think was really important about that to you?

Tim Jones [01:34:30] Make law. You make law. Simple. The listing is a law. You know, laws follow from that. You, you, you have criteria manuals that are established by the City that are derived from findings about how pollution occurs and what you do about it. So you create law. That's, that's basically it.

Tim Jones [01:35:04] And some of that law is places on the ground that you can't touch. It's a park. It's a preserve, one thing or another.

Tim Jones [01:35:12] But, but the only thing you have, there are two things you have. You have laws, and they're transitory. You have something a little bit better. And Jenny's got one of those: it was a conservation easement. And that's in perpetuity, maybe, hopefully. Create one of those and you've really got something solid. The next most solid thing you can.

Tim Jones [01:35:33] Well, you know, you know what a law, you know, nothing means anything anymore because the Supreme Court queered everything. You know, they, sorry, maybe for that language, but they. You know, stare decisis, you know, nothing means anything anymore. There is no precedent. There is no meaning. Because of this rotten Supreme Court we have. Supreme Court's been rotten for a long time. It's been rotten from the get-go, for that matter, because they had slaveholders. You know, there were there were Supreme Court justices, you know, so it's always been a can of worms.

Tim Jones [01:36:11] But they, the Warren Court, did good things. But, but now it's gone so far south that there is no meaning anymore to, to anything anybody does because soon as you get, you know, somebody with a strong, enough money, basically, enough money, you see, the corporations, you know, steal everybody's money. They can throw it at a bunch of lawyers and they can, they can change everything.

Tim Jones [01:36:37] And that's what's happening to us. It's happening to us with the warbler. That's just money thrown by the state. You know, at the, and the Fish and Wildlife Service is afraid that some other thing will happen to them. I don't know how they've got them under their thumb now.

David Todd [01:36:54] You're talking about the de-listing effort, is that right? What do you have to say about that?

Tim Jones [01:37:00] It's a fraud. You know, you cannot tell me that there are more warblers around now than there were then. There may be more warblers in the preserve, but you can't extrapolate that to everywhere. And I know there's not, I can't, there certainly are not more warblers here than there were. We may have seen a warbler. Oh, I know we've seen warblers out on Waterstone years before. But we see one a year, maybe. We don't see them every year. We may see one, and it could be passing through, because it's just a little place.

Tim Jones [01:37:39] And, you know, the threats to a warbler are many. You know, climate change is a major threat because it's drying up all the water places. It's killing off all the insect base. So there is a major threat to that. Look at this drought. Watch the armadillos. I feed armadillos dog food and a bone pudding that we make, we make out of chicken - bones and flesh and whatever that we can't feed the foxes. We take everything from a roast chicken, the kind you buy at the H-E-B. We shred all the food, the meat off of that, set and set that aside. Then we take all the bones and everything that hangs on the bones and whatever, we put it in a blender and blend it up, and then we drain all the shards out of that so that there's nothing we throw away except sharp shards of bone. We gel that, we mix it thick so it makes it gel.

Tim Jones [01:38:37] We feed that to the armadillos and the skunks and the possums and everybody else. But the armadillos wait at night to come in and get it. They will, they're in the backyard waiting literally for us to bring that out.

Tim Jones [01:38:51] What I'm trying to get to is that there's, that we're killing the earth. We're killing the, the food for animals, the insect base. Everything is dying. I can see it. I see it because an armadillo would not come up to me in normal circumstances. There's no way that an armadillo, as fearful and blind as they are, would ever approach a human being. No, they run. They don't, these don't run. They run to me. That's because it's so dry that there's no insects. It's the same for the birds. There's no insects.

Tim Jones [01:39:31] So, so when you take away the water, what do the birds eat? Okay, when you take away, when you, when you cover up everything with asphalt and concrete, where do they make their nests? You know?

Tim Jones [01:39:46] And then there's what's called "edge effects". And ranchers, you know, who are going to have their way with everything that they can. So they have brown-headed cowbirds. You know, they're called cowbirds because they follow cattle around looking for the bird, the bugs that cows kick up. Right?

Tim Jones [01:40:04] But brown-headed cowbirds, the only way they survive is by predating or being nest parasites on other birds. And those birds are ones that are too stupid to know that that egg in their nest is not one they laid. They can't tell for some reason. They can't tell because a bird's a little bit bigger egg, whatever. But it's a bigger egg makes a bigger bird. So the brown-headed cowbird brought in, you know, because, okay, the brown-headed cowbird causes nest predation on these, these neotropical passerines.

Tim Jones [01:40:43] When, when you divide, okay. Another element of that is that we have what's called an edge effect. A brown-headed cowbird goes in about 100 yards into a wooded area. That's about as far inside a wooded area as they go because they forage in the pastures and things, that's their niche. But they, they nest, they look for nests about 100 yards into a wooded area.

Tim Jones [01:41:13] So what happens when you've got a wooded area that's 200 yards by 200 yards? That's pretty good little patch there, right? You'd think. Except, the brown-head cowbirds. Birds are coming in from every direction. There's no place safe. And that's what habitat fragmentation is.

Tim Jones [01:41:38] And that's what's happened to the Hill Country, all over the place. It's been fragmented horribly by roads and by ranching and land development, and it's been going on for decades. And now they're saying, "Oh, there's more warblers than there ever were." Well, that's a goddamn lie. There's nothing more than there ever was, except people, and dogs.

David Todd [01:42:07] People and dogs and, and then these warblers. Not so many.

David Todd [01:42:13] Well, let's just maybe ask you one last question, and that is, is there something that I have overlooked that I should have asked you or we should have covered about the golden-cheeked warbler and about your experience and thoughts about the bird, or your predictions about its, its future?

Tim Jones [01:42:40] I don't know. I don't know. It's all kind of ... Lisa O'Donnell is going to, she's either going to prevail or she's not. And the way that the forces are, they've got all the money. And now it looks like they've got the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Tim Jones [01:42:57] So the thing is that we do have the preserves, and I don't think they can make those go away. That's going to be hard to do to make them go away. I don't know. And I don't very strongly suspect that there is enough land within the preserves to form a viable base for the warbler. I don't think there will be enough of them, that there's enough land to make enough warblers so that that they can evolve. Animals have to evolve. And that means that the population has to be, has to have a lot of diversity.

Tim Jones [01:43:46] And if it doesn't have that, then, then things happen. You know, they get a disease or something. If some of them aren't immune to that disease or whatever, then they all die from that. So, so you've got to have diversity and you have to have a fairly large population base. If you don't have those things and people, then animals go extinct.

Tim Jones [01:44:13] And that's why the warbler is listed, because we feared that. And now a bunch of liars and greedy people are out to, just fool everybody and, and think that, make us think wrong things. They're liars. They're liars in so many ways now. Everything they do is a fucking lie. And they're going to have it all. And they're going to destroy the planet.

Tim Jones [01:44:48] And you'll find out in about three years when they keep talking about, "Oh, we have we're going to have irreversible climate change, but it's just going to go there and then come back." Have you heard that? Have you seen that? How they're talking about climate change and in 2025, we're going to reach the tipping point, but then it'll tip back. Have you been reading that bullshit?

David Todd [01:45:11] I have not. I think we need a lot of apologists for this stuff. But what I liked about your work is that I think you've tried to tell it the way it is and report it, and document it, and share it. And I really admire you for what you've contributed.

David Todd [01:45:34] And, and also, of course, wanted to thank you for your time today.

Tim Jones [01:45:38] Oh, you're welcome. Yeah, it's been fun. It's been nice to hear your thoughts and experiences, and I wish you the best and say hi to your partner, Jenny, and please thank her for the many contributions she's made too.

Tim Jones [01:45:55] All right. Well, I'm sorry to make it end on such a grim note, but I don't know. We can only hope.

David Todd [01:46:01] Well, you're telling it the way it is and the way you see it. So nothing wrong with that. And I appreciate your honesty and frankness. And, of course, like I said, all you've contributed.

Tim Jones [01:46:14] Thank you.

David Todd [01:46:15] All right. You have a good day.

Tim Jones [01:46:16] Yeah, you too, David.

David Todd [01:46:17] All right, you take care.

Tim Jones [01:46:19] Bye, now.

David Todd [01:46:20] Bye bye.