

**TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEWEE:** John Karger

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

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**David Todd** [00:00:03] Well, good morning. David Todd here.

**David Todd** [00:00:06] And I have the great privilege of being on the line with John Karger.

**David Todd** [00:00:12] And with his permission, we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of a non-profit group called the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a web site for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for preservation at an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, which is at the University of Texas at Austin.

**David Todd** [00:00:37] And I want to stress that he would have all rights to use the recording as he sees fit. It belongs to him.

**David Todd** [00:00:44] And I want to make sure that that's okay with you.

**John Karger** [00:00:47] It is perfectly fine with me.

**David Todd** [00:00:50] Super. Okay.

**David Todd** [00:00:52] Well, it is Friday, August 4th, 2023. It's about 10:35 Central Time. As I said, my name is David Todd, and I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas. I am in Austin and we are conducting a remote audio interview over Zoom with John Karger, who is based in the Comfort area.

**David Todd** [00:01:16] Mr. Karger is a master falconer. He's a veterinary technician and he's the founder and executive director of a non-profit known as Last Chance Forever, the Bird of Prey Conservancy. Last Chance Forever handles injured or orphaned raptors and seeks to rehabilitate them before returning them to the wild. These birds of prey are also part of many educational programs that Mr. Karger's group offers that teach about the key role that these birds play in a healthy ecosystem.

**David Todd** [00:01:52] So, with that little introduction, I hope that we can lead into talking about Mr. Karger's life and career, to date, and especially focus on what he has learned about the history and nature of raptor-related education and conservation.

**David Todd** [00:02:09] So, a little preamble done, I'd like to just start by talking to him about his childhood. I understand that he grew up mainly in San Antonio, but he traces his family with deep roots back to the mid-1850s in Texas, mostly in the Hill Country communities of Comfort, Cypress Creek and Kerrville. And I was hoping that you could tell us about any family traditions or relatives or maybe friends or other events that might have helped, I guess, get you started on this interest in wildlife and in raptors in particular.

**John Karger** [00:02:50] Well, I would have to say that it was both my mother and my father, and also a grandfather and grandmother on my mother's side, as well as a grandmother on my father's side. They all had an attitude of realizing that their families were immigrants and that they had a connection to the land.

**John Karger** [00:03:21] But mostly it was my mother because there was always a goat in the back yard. Somebody up at the ranch couldn't take care of their baby, or they had a death there in the birth. So, there was always a goat that was brought home or some sort of wild critter that was found.

**John Karger** [00:03:44] And my family were ranchers, but they also were pretty good conservators of the land.

**John Karger** [00:03:52] But my mother always said that we have to rise above and take care of those that don't have a voice. And so, we would take care of these critters that would come in, whether it be a domesticated goat, a calf, or perhaps maybe it was a ring-tailed cat or raccoon or something. And I started very quickly, at a young age, learning this from my mother.

**John Karger** [00:04:25] But she also decided that if she was going to get me involved on the passion side of it, that I don't know how she came about, I could not tell you how she came about coming up with her philosophy, but essentially, she said, you're going to do this with passion, but also with knowledge.

**John Karger** [00:04:50] And my life has always been very protected by what I call an angel on the shoulder, somebody, something that's guiding me and tries really hard to keep me out of pickles. But I have tested that many, many times.

**John Karger** [00:05:10] But, you know, for example, we had a, when I was very young, I had a pet rat and then a pet bird. And they died. And my mother abided by what I was being taught through the family at the time, that we should give it a burial.

**David Todd** [00:05:37] So, we put it in a box and took it out in the backyard and put tissue paper around it and we buried it, said goodbye. And I think that was her way of letting me see closure.

**John Karger** [00:05:51] And I think unfortunately today I doubt there are many children that are made to go see their relatives. I think I'm one of the last generations of that. An uncle, that was not a blood uncle (that's another thing that we don't do these days anymore), passed away next to my grandmother. And we were paraded in there to see him and say goodbye to him as he laid in white linen on his favorite place to lay on the couch.

**John Karger** [00:06:21] Then they took him to the funeral home. But it was a private family affair in the beginning.

**John Karger** [00:06:27] And so, back to this box. Six months later, my mother says to me, "We're going out the backyard and what are we going to do? We're going to uncover this."

**John Karger** [00:06:38] "We're going to what? Wait, wait, wait a minute. We're going to, you know, we're going to go get Uncle Frank out of the ground?"

**John Karger** [00:06:47] "No, no. We're going to uncover this cardboard box where your pet was."

**John Karger** [00:06:53] And we took this bird out of this box. We opened it up. And of course it was very desiccated. And we opened it up. And in those days, the only glue you had was Schlage glue, which was a horse hooves. It's the worst glue in the world. It took forever to dry, highly sticky, rubbery.

**John Karger** [00:07:16] But, by golly, she and I cleaned that entire skeleton and we put it back together. So we had it standing up and she never once referred to it as the passion side of me. You know, here you've got your pet back.

**John Karger** [00:07:35] But I asked myself, "How did she know? That what she was teaching me, at that moment, at that moment, how did she know that today, when I look at an injured bird of prey, I can look at that bird cage, watching it, observing it, and I can see where they're broke."

**John Karger** [00:07:59] Because what I'm looking at is how the muscles move on the skeleton, how the skeleton is attached. And in my mind, in my mind's eye, I see that skeleton from point A to point Z.

**John Karger** [00:08:16] So that's, I'm going to give her the biggest credit. She also said, she affected me when it comes to doing educational programing, just from the smallest the youngest age, I can't remember, we always had creatures there. And there was always people who came to the house and there was a back porch full of little animals. Backyard had some cages in it later on in my life.

**John Karger** [00:08:44] And we walked people through them and said, "This is why we have them. This is what we're doing to them." It wasn't just a zoo. We had a purpose. We didn't believe in keeping animals that weren't domestic farm animals for any other purpose. We didn't have a zoo, but we were doing something for them.

**John Karger** [00:09:05] And so, I had to talk to them. And she said, "Just tell them the truth and they won't cut your throat."

**John Karger** [00:09:13] And so, yes. That's a long way around it. But I think my father was the one who believed that if it was hurt out there, he'd bring it home. My mother was the one with a nurturing side, and my relatives were supportive.

**David Todd** [00:09:32] That's wonderful. It's so nice to have a supportive, understanding family that, you know, points you in the right direction.

**David Todd** [00:09:40] So, tell me a little bit about your schooling. I mean, were there any teachers or classmates that might have been interested in similar things or taught you things that you remember or just encouraged you to follow this star?

**John Karger** [00:09:56] From the young age up until high school, it was my relatives and my mother and neighbors. Because you know what? Here's what happens. People learn rather quickly: there's someone who cares. They don't know what to do. It's the same today. They

don't know what to do with a wild animal. They see it and they have compassion for it. It's hurt. It's not doing something right.

**John Karger** [00:10:21] So, I got called out. I mean, one time in elementary school, my principal called my mother and said, "There's a raccoon up in the tree and the animal control people have come and knocked it out of the tree. And I know that, John, that would really hurt him. And they took him to the pound." And you know what happens to animals that go to the pound, which they don't call it that anymore? That was a death sentence.

**John Karger** [00:10:50] And I'll admit it today that I went and waited till the shift changed. And after I looked at the animal the first time, I figured out it had a couple of toes missing on one foot. Probably was a trap. So, when the shift changed, I went back in and identified it, and took it out of there.

**John Karger** [00:11:08] And so right there, my elementary principal was involved. My mother mostly was involved with caring for them. She'd do the research trying to figure out how we could rehabilitate this animal.

**John Karger** [00:11:24] How well we did? I don't know. When I was very young, one of the first birds of prey we ever got were barn owls. And I did a miserable job in the beginning. We had five in a bucket. And I don't know if you've ever seen a barn owl. My wife describes them when they're very young, they look like skeksis. And that's, I don't know whether you know what a skeksis is, but it's from one of the movies. And they're ugly little creatures.

**John Karger** [00:11:54] So my mother said, "I don't think your friend did you a favor." And we started raising them. And golly, they turned into these beautiful barn owls, *Tyto alba*. And they just were gorgeous.

**John Karger** [00:12:10] But I made a mistake. The very first one - I killed that bird because I did not feed it properly. They grow up fast. They develop muscle extremely fast. And if you don't have a complete diet, that muscle overrides their body form, their bones, and they begin to deform. And then their development system, their body able to absorb their food goes wacky. And so that bird died.

**John Karger** [00:12:47] The second bird, I just thought it was the greatest thing in the world that he'd eat from my hand. And I think I was about seven or eight years old. And I thought it was just the greatest thing that he would eat from my hand and he would chitter at me whenever I came to it.

**John Karger** [00:13:09] I didn't know that he was looking at me. He was young enough that when he started clearing off with his eyes... They're just like you and I there: for a few days there, a little while there, they're unable to see well, and they imprint on sound. I mean, a bird imprints when they're in the egg. They hear their parents outside, just like we hear our parents.

**John Karger** [00:13:32] So, when this bird's eyes started clearing, it literally saw me as a parent and then it was really cool. It followed me around, which I did not know: it was a death sentence. Followed me around the house, backyard. All along, the others were developing. But, you know, when one takes away your attention, you just there's that angel sitting on my shoulder like this. This guy's an idiot. I got to protect him and protect these birds. And so he's distracted now by these, the death of this one, and this one he's raising.

**John Karger** [00:14:07] And I went to cross the street, and it got hit by a truck. And I had to deal with that death.

**David Todd** [00:14:14] Hmm.

**John Karger** [00:14:14] And that was the moment that I walked five blocks to a veterinary hospital. And a veterinarian by the name of B.C. Hickey, Bud Hickey. H-I-C-K-E-Y. He's gone now. Had Hickey Animal Clinic. I walked in there, stood at his door. Haven't any idea. I didn't have any money in my pocket. My parents didn't even know I went down there. I just knew there had to be a doctor for animals.

**John Karger** [00:14:44] And we didn't use, you know, in those days they didn't use veterinarians much. Couldn't afford them, really. And farm people certainly didn't do it much. They had people coming out to the farm and ranch.

**John Karger** [00:14:57] But he looked over the counter at me and he said, "Well, I don't know much about birds, but you know what? Let's look at them right now and see what I can do."

**John Karger** [00:15:07] And at just a basic level, animals are animals. So he gave him some fluids and he checked him over and he said, "You know, you've got to change the diet. I can see right now you're going to have some problems."

**John Karger** [00:15:22] And I told him about the others. And he said you are going to problems with these.

**John Karger** [00:15:26] So, I followed his pattern. He said, "If you come back tomorrow, I would get my books and I will call some of my friends."

**John Karger** [00:15:34] And I came back. And, you know. 30 years after that, at some dinner, he made a remark. He said, "You know, you were a chubby little kid and you walked in with a bucket full of owls. Things haven't changed much."

**John Karger** [00:15:48] And that's where I got started.

**John Karger** [00:15:51] He referred me to a Dr. Mary Mainster and a Dr. Thomas Vice in San Antonio. And they, all three of them, said, they were adamant, if you're going to take care of these creatures, you've got to do it properly and do it with science. Do it with purpose.

**John Karger** [00:16:10] So, that was the beginning of the road of using veterinary medicine, along with just caring, to do it properly.

**John Karger** [00:16:19] So, we got on the road of researching the diet. And three birds were released successfully without following me around. They were put back in the wild, in a place where I had talked that person into how valuable they were.

**John Karger** [00:16:35] So, Dr. Vice, Dr. Mainster, Dr. Hickey were just ... Dr. Mainster and Dr. Vice were in the business of taking care of regular animals and exotic animals. So, they too were probably very, very instrumental in what I did.

**John Karger** [00:16:52] So, now that takes me up into high school.

**John Karger** [00:16:58] Before that, at nine years of age, I met a man in my neighborhood. Didn't know he was there. It's a classic American story.

**John Karger** [00:17:09] We're playing one-base baseball. I don't know how many kids these days even know what that is. First off, you only have two or three of your friends. And second, you have a narrow street. So, you better hit that ball straight down the line to the pitcher. And the batter usually is the batter and the catcher and plays against himself, because if he misses the ball or hits the ball and it goes just a short distance. He has to pick that ball up, and throw it to the pitcher. But his goal is to get past the pitcher and get to the bases behind the pitcher. So you swap positions with three or four people - no more than four generally - and one-base baseball was played.

**John Karger** [00:17:51] Well, baseball went over a guy's fence. We didn't know he was a very private person. We were always, as kids will be, kind of mean, you know, and stared through the fences, and wondered who he was, and called him names, you know, because he was an elder and we didn't have any social interaction with him.

**John Karger** [00:18:14] And my ball went over his fence. And little did I know that that was going to be my introduction to falconry. He was a falconer a long time ago, and long before he ever met me. And it just took me. It was a different outlook. It was these birds sitting on perches.

**John Karger** [00:18:39] And so, I badgered him to death for a few years, so he would teach me. But it helped put another aspect. I had the compassion. I had the veterinary medicine. And now there's this angle of somebody who has learned how to interact with wild birds in a manner that keeps them wild to the extent that they partner with you.

**John Karger** [00:19:09] You don't turn them into pets. You don't - it's my own term. I'll have to explain it. It's "Oodgie-boodgie". In other words, you don't hug them and kiss them. And you don't you don't turn them into pets.

**John Karger** [00:19:23] But, at the same time, they become very good partners because they're bright. They know it's hard out there. They have to sit 5 hours, 6 hours a day to wait for a rabbit to walk by. And that may not be the right rabbit, because it's a healthy rabbit that runs like everything. And they're looking for what they're supposed to do, and that is to provide checks and balances. So they're looking for that rabbit that's slower. They're smart.

**John Karger** [00:19:50] A, they're not going to go after something that's perfect and running at perfect speed.

**John Karger** [00:19:54] And B, they're taught innately in their head that they're supposed to catch the weak and keep nature healthy - checks and balances of nature.

**John Karger** [00:20:03] So, here was this human who had the ability to put a bird on his hand. So I went in and got my ball. But that's where my falconry education started.

**John Karger** [00:20:15] All right now. Go up into high school. I start high school. My parents give me the option to go to a local high school, or I was going to have to ride a bus to another one because I had uncles that went to this other high school, which was Burbank High School

in San Antonio, which still to this day continues to be, I think they've changed a little bit, but I think they still have lots of vocational programs.

**John Karger** [00:20:42] And I dislike highly how people, it's taken them so long to figure out that you've got to have farmers, ranchers, garbage men, welders, electricians, carpenters. Those vocational educations are highly important and probably, you know, the universities didn't really promote that much.

**John Karger** [00:21:03] But they wanted, they gave me the option to go to Burbank High School. So I had to ride a bus every day to school. And I went to the regional agricultural school, which was 3 hours in the morning and then 3 hours in the afternoon, of going to regular classes.

**John Karger** [00:21:23] This ag department at that time, which I don't think that there are many of them in in our area nowadays, they had their own farm. And they had chickens and ducks and pigs. And they had cattle. And they were in the business of teaching young Future Farmers of America, FFA members, how to take care of the land, how to raise these animals properly.

**John Karger** [00:21:50] And of course, that was my family, you know, pushing me in the direction of, "All right, look, you know, you have some history here, so this might be interesting for you." And I'm sure that it came from a time when I was real young. My father took me to his business and said, where he was working at the time he said, "You will never work here. Understand that. You will never work here."

**John Karger** [00:22:15] And at that moment, he did something that no parent should ever do, I think. But he had all three of his children there, and somebody came up and they said, "Tell me about your children."

**John Karger** [00:22:28] "Oh, this is my oldest son. He'll be fine. Knows how to save money, and he'll be fine."

**John Karger** [00:22:34] Looked at my sister. Middle child, I mean, the outer child, the last child. He said, "That's my little girl. She doesn't have to worry. I'll take care of her."

**John Karger** [00:22:43] "This one?" Pointed to me. "I don't know about this one. I think he's kind of lazy, and he is task-oriented, but it's got to be a task that he likes."

**John Karger** [00:22:57] I don't think any ... I'm not angry at him for it. Probably used it as a driving factor. But I don't think any parent should ever make that kind of judgment at that age. It affected me.

**John Karger** [00:23:07] And so, going to high school, I went to the agriculture school. I just jumped right in. I loved it. I raised a Brahma cross calf. And went and showed it in the local stock show, and did very well with it. I got on the debate club and we learned parliamentary procedure. We took care of lots of animals, bred lots of pigs, championship pigs, championship steers and bulls. And we, part of my class spread manure on a field, and learned how to drive a tractor, which I really already knew.

**John Karger** [00:23:48] But, every day we learned about agriculture.

**John Karger** [00:23:53] I had an ag teacher that I did not know was only five years older than me. You know how kids are. He's old. But he was just out of college and he was understanding. It didn't take him very long to figure out that I didn't fit in with, you know, the usual kids that came right off of farms that were there. I had a link in the city.

**John Karger** [00:24:22] And, and if I get to rambling, you stop me. But one of the side things - it's funny. I went to high school and got in the ag program. Wasn't there two weeks, I came home to my mother on a Friday and I said, "Mom, I got a real problem." She said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Well, all the kids dip snuff and chew tobacco. I tried it. It was awful. It made me throw up." Said, "But I don't know what to do. They're all kind of teasing me." And she said, "Well, let me think about it."

**John Karger** [00:24:58] And by Sunday, she said, "I've got a solution." She went down to my uncle's house and she came back with aluminum foil, Beechnut chewing tobacco package. She'd cleaned it all out. Now, this is motherly love. Cleaned it all out. And for the three years of going to high school (at that time it was ten, 11 and 12), every Sunday, she baked fudge brownies without any icing and put it in that package.

**John Karger** [00:25:29] And she said, "You do not tell anybody what this is. You put it in your mouth this way." And I did that.

**John Karger** [00:25:40] And a great side story with that is that 20 years later, 25 years later, I met one of my students and he goes, "Do you know how sick you made everybody?" "What do you mean?" "Well, they want to be cool like you. You didn't spit."

**John Karger** [00:25:53] So, they were trying to swallow that chewing tobacco. They didn't know that had fudge brownies in my mouth.

**John Karger** [00:26:02] But my ag teacher knew I wasn't going to make it if I didn't... I don't know how they do it today. At that time, you had to have a senior project. And I just wasn't fitting in with setting up a breeding project for pigs. I thought they smelled a little bit.

**John Karger** [00:26:22] And I wasn't set up for becoming a full debater or anything, and he figured out that there was a young man that was a student with me and he and I on every oh, I don't know how many times, we would, on weekends, we would go out to his family's ranch in Devine, Texas.

**John Karger** [00:26:45] Crazy thing - you know, these are the days that my mother would show up. I would have given her a call from the ag department. She said, "Yes, you can go." And so once or twice a month I might (she'd bring my .22 rifle to the Ag Department), after school and this young man could drive. I couldn't drive. We'd go down to Devine. And he'd take me all over the place looking for birds of prey.

**John Karger** [00:27:13] And we, you know, we just loved looking at them. We'd find nests. And as a kid, you know, we did things that were crazy. I'm sure we're going to get something from it. But, you know, we took a piece of barbed wire and turned it into a crank, and it's sticking out a hole of a tree, and you'd crank it really hard with a barb on the end and you'd see what came out and chased you.

**John Karger** [00:27:32] And we went all over that property. Looking for craters and holes and looking at birds and nests.

**John Karger** [00:27:39] But my teacher figured out my love of raptors and he took and allowed me to take a chicken house. And we did do the one project that he wanted, which we raised a thousand chickens, broilers. My family got involved - direct family, my extended family. And we raised those thousand chickens in a project with another couple of people and we killed those chickens and we processed those chickens. And I will tell you, I don't ever want to do that again. That was a hard job. Not only raising them, but processing them. But, you know, it gives you a grounding of where your food comes from, what what effect that food's going to have on you.

**John Karger** [00:28:19] Say, we did that, I did that project.

**John Karger** [00:28:22] But for my senior project, he allowed me to clean out that same chicken house. And my friend and I had managed to, through people, find a couple of Harris hawks. Harris hawks are a South Texas breed. They're found in Texas all the way to California. They have had a hard time in California because of the population, people, loss of territory. South Texas is having some of that, too. It's a very protected species these days.

**John Karger** [00:28:54] Yet, John Audubon called them originally bay-winged hawks because they have a ruddy red color on the top of the wing and under the wing and down the side of the leg, sort of the same color as a bay horse. And they call them bay-winged hawks. Later on, a fellow by the name of Harris, Edward Harris, I believe, discovered them all the way to California. And so, Audubon, since he was a contributor, let them call him Harris's (plural) hawk.

**John Karger** [00:29:24] But my ag teacher allowed me to put those birds into a chicken house, which was really against the grain of agriculture. My God, he's putting chicken hawks in the chicken house, because there wasn't another name for them. But he made me research them: what they were, where they lived, what was their impact, what was their primary diet?

**John Karger** [00:29:48] And we bred Harris's hawks in there and then we were able to release those Harris's hawks.

**John Karger** [00:29:53] Was it the first time they were captive bred? I doubt it. But at the same time, it was still a great experience.

**John Karger** [00:29:59] And how did he know that that was going to impact? I don't know.

**John Karger** [00:30:05] It's that, it's that something sitting on my shoulder that said ... well, today I can explain it by saying we don't know where our genetic lineage has been. And somewhere in all those genetics, there is somebody in my life that had this, that repeated this history somewhere.

**John Karger** [00:30:29] And so that really just impacted me even more now.

**John Karger** [00:30:33] So, I was playing sports also in high school. And I didn't go to college. And I wanted to go to A&M, and I did not go there to finish.

**John Karger** [00:30:46] And so, Dr. Mainster, Dr. Hickey and Dr. Vice started me in a program called "veterinary technology". So, my schooling, on one side, is the school of hard knocks and

experience. So, people who were masters at what they do, whether that be my mother in what I described, whether it be veterinarians.

**John Karger** [00:31:14] And then, I took these courses and I passed with Texas Veterinary Medical Association, their requirements for registering as a veterinary technician and it's changed in the last few years, their names. But today it's an "AHT" behind my name which is Animal Health Technician. So, I did acquire those certificates. And then I specialized a little bit in avian anesthesiology, got several certificates in that.

**John Karger** [00:31:51] So that Dr. Vice and Dr. Mainster who later on hired me, it made me more valuable to them. So I became a technician. They used to call it a "super technician". I worked a little bit for Dr. Hickey to pay back my, what I felt my debt to him, but I work most of the time with Dr. Mainster and Dr. Vice.

**John Karger** [00:32:11] And they turned me into a surgical technician, and so I helped them by opening and closing. I helped them by preparing a surgical case. I helped them in surgical, excuse me, in exam rooms. They had three exam rooms, had every one of those things hopping, and we had them moving every 15 minutes. So we prepared everything.

**John Karger** [00:32:33] So my education is in what I like to say, wildlife science and veterinary medicine. But I'm not a veterinarian. I'm a veterinary technician.

**John Karger** [00:32:43] And the wildlife science side of it was, is that I was in and out of A&M involved through these veterinarians and through people that I was introduced to with the Wildlife Science Department at Texas A&M University and with the Veterinary Department, because I would get sent up there with them with special cases and things.

**John Karger** [00:33:01] So, I was around the vet center a lot and I was around the Wildlife Science Department because they had a range. A "range" means from one end to the other. A "range" in a wildlife science department is a place where you have stuffed specimens that you can study. So, you open up drawers and there are 25 Harris's hawks. There are 25 Sharpshinned hawks. There are golden eagles. There's every species of wild creature you can find from all ends, from the ocean to the mountains.

**John Karger** [00:33:38] So, I went to the range a lot and I met all those people and spent time with them. So the school of hard knocks taught me the science end of it there. And again, that was at the push of Dr. Vice and Dr. Mainster, Dr. Hickey, because they did not want someone working in their clinics who was unprofessional and not educated scientifically.

**John Karger** [00:34:02] So, do I have a degree? My degree is I went to the school of hard knocks at the university of life and my degree is in veterinary technology. And for a long, long time being registered meant you had to keep up with your continuing education. I veered off from that, and we can get into that whenever you want to ask me about it. But I veered off from the clinics.

**John Karger** [00:34:23] One time, I went to Dr. Vice and I said, "My dream has been to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service or Texas Parks and Wildlife Department." And that opportunity came up and he said, "I hate to lose you, but I want you to know you can come back any time." And I remember my very first question to him was, "I want to buy a pickup truck." I said, "Am I going to have a job for a while?" He said, "You got a job as long as you want it." So, I bought a pickup truck.

**John Karger** [00:34:50] But my life veered at that time.

**John Karger** [00:34:53] So, that's kind of my background, where I came from.

**David Todd** [00:34:56] OK.

**John Karger** [00:34:56] So, these people made sure that I was a scientist.

**David Todd** [00:35:02] Well, you're so lucky to have had these mentors and friends and supporters. That's great.

**David Todd** [00:35:08] I'm curious if there was anything sort of in the general culture around this circle of people that were influential - you know, movies, TV shows, books, anything else that you might have read or come across that was important to you.

**John Karger** [00:35:27] Well, falconry is not something you can learn out of a book. However, it helps tremendously. I, during the period with Dr. Vice and Dr. Mainster, I was introduced to a Dr. Peter Cragg who had a double master's degree and then a DVM. He was a specialist in poultry diseases. He was doing an internship with Dr. Vice. And he was a falconer.

**John Karger** [00:36:00] And he just, you know, took me up and, and you know how that works. He was a researcher, too. And he had a banding permit. A banding permit is issued through the United States Government, Fish and Wildlife Service. They do cooperative work with the banding laboratory in Maryland at Patuxent. And he had a banding permit through Dr. Keith Arnold, Texas A&M University.

**John Karger** [00:36:32] So, in being around Peter, Dr. Cragg, I was taken to A&M. I had very liberal parents in that sense, trusting, and taken to A&M and Dr. Arnold in the Wildlife Department, because if I was going to be a subpermittee of Peter, I became the grunt.

**John Karger** [00:36:52] I did it. It's your turn to crawl up the tree. When you get up there, here's what you're going to do. You're going to get those little great-horned owls out. You're going to put them in a bucket. You're going to lower it down, hang in that tree until I get bands on them, and take some data. And that's probably going to happen unless you want to crawl down and crawl back up until we get another undergrunt. And then you'll be able to come down when you send the birds down or you'll be down on the ground when he sends it down or she sends it down.

**John Karger** [00:37:21] And so, I went out in the field with him. And he was very influential, and introduced me to, you know, being around Dr. Keith Arnold and being around the Wildlife Science Department and veterinary school and such, you got to read or you're a dummy. They don't suffer fools very well, because they got, they have a short amount of time to make a doctor.

**John Karger** [00:37:52] And a doctor of veterinary medicine actually takes more education than an M.D., because you're dealing with animals that can't talk to you. They can't tell you where they hurt. So, in that short amount of time - it could be as long as eight years - you got to get an undergrad degree and then, you know, my mother always said I should have been a veterinarian, but my math skills, my chemistry skills weren't that good. I'm a very visual person. I have to visualize math before I do it.

**John Karger** [00:38:28] But you had to be studied. And so I was handed books by Pete Cragg and documents for Dr. Vice on the subjects that I was dealing with, which included raptors. So, yes, I would say that.

**John Karger** [00:38:43] You know, and backing up, you know, when I was real little, I took all kinds of things apart. So my mother gave me a small physics book. She said, "I'm giving it to you so you don't blow our house up. You need to understand how electricity works because you're always taking things apart and plugging them back in."

**John Karger** [00:38:58] So, it just fell right into when you're taking apart birds and putting them back together.

**John Karger** [00:39:03] So, yes, I think that the books, the books of falconry, that were handed to me that well, I'll tell you, they're guarded today. There are new ones that are written, but the older ones are hard to come by. And you're entrusted with them to take care of them and read them and then go back and you are grilled on them through people who know the art, the sport.

**John Karger** [00:39:27] And then when it comes to veterinary medicine, you've got an animal in the balance, that life is in the balance. And so you better not spit out something out of your mouth. A different generation would look at you like, "What kind of a foolish statement was that?" And might slap you on the back of the head. You know, I'm sure people would go, "Oh, my God, what a cruel world." But, you know, that was just called a "dope slap". You know, "Don't do that again", you know.

**John Karger** [00:39:58] And here's a book. Learn about this, then you'll know. That's how I figured out what was the, you know, the blood work of a bird of prey and other animals. I figured out what their parasites were by reading books that were introduced to me from these people.

**David Todd** [00:40:17] So speaking of getting introduced, I think you mentioned Dr. Cragg, who is a falconer, but then there was also your neighbor with the fence and the baseball and you met him - I'm not sure if I caught his name. But I was wondering if you could just give us a little bit more detail about what they taught you as they sort of pulled you in as a mentor, and as, I guess you said, the undergrunt in Dr. Cragg's case.

**John Karger** [00:40:52] So the man's name was Emory. And I learned two major things from him. How to respect birds of prey and be able to work with them. That's two things. Okay. Third thing, how to make a good cup of tea.

**John Karger** [00:41:14] He was elderly. He was English and he knew that English tea was calming. And you must take, you really should take a couple of times a day and stop, reflect.

**John Karger** [00:41:30] And the first thing he taught me was that you got to learn how to make a good cup of tea or you're not going to be around here.

**John Karger** [00:41:38] But he taught me how to pick birds up off the perches. I do the same today for students.

**John Karger** [00:41:43] How to look at, they have a name for it in falconry, it is called a mute. And a mute is a poop. You look at it and you analyze it. It's got to be a certain color. It's got to be a mixture of colors because their system is such that they digest their food in a 12-hour period. And during that period, they don't have a way to urinate and exude manure. It's together. It's a urate.

**John Karger** [00:42:15] And in that urate, it's got to be a bright white, like an egg with a dark black center. The black center is a pitch color, black, if it's healthy. If it has a green in it, or it has a red, which is blood, green is a bile: he taught me all that.

**John Karger** [00:42:35] And then how to approach these birds. You don't approach it from the aspect of, and Peter just carried it on, Dr. Cragg carried that on. You don't approach him from the attitude of "Come here, little bird. I sure do love you."

**John Karger** [00:42:50] Because you know what they think? "Hah, you're a mouse and I think I'm going to eat you."

**John Karger** [00:42:55] You approach them with slow, respectful moves that they judge, and you judge their movements, because they're going to tell you whether they're going to protect themselves or they're going to be curious of you. And in that curious period, you pick them up onto a gauntlet or a glove.

**John Karger** [00:43:14] And then you do something in falconry called, "manning", which is a shortened term for "humaning". It has nothing to do with male or female. It's, manning, is a shortened term of being able to carry them around. A human carries them around until they're tolerant of being that close to you.

**John Karger** [00:43:32] All of those are shortening in the distance from the tree to your hand, from the cliff to your hand, from the sky to your hand.

**John Karger** [00:43:41] And not being stupid, they'll figure out rather quickly: "Hah, this is a much easier life, you know? I don't have to sit around and wait for a rabbit. This guy's going."

**John Karger** [00:43:53] You become the bird dog, essentially. I'm going to walk around in circles while you sit in the tree, and I'm going to kick up a rabbit a lot faster than you have to wait for one. And we make a chase and then they figure out rather quickly, because you have learned that everything, this is something we can learn day to day, is we should share everything with everyone.

**John Karger** [00:44:14] And bird catches the rabbit.

**John Karger** [00:44:18] Well, hopefully you manage it well enough to be able to approach it. You've manned it well enough to let it feed and know that it's successful, because if you rob that food from that bird at the wrong time, it's going to dislike you. It's going to say, "You know what? My mom taught me that humans are just nasty and they're right and I'm leaving."

**John Karger** [00:44:40] And they don't need you. See? Yeah.

**John Karger** [00:44:42] And you put the bird up on your hand. You take a rabbit out from under and put it inside of a falconry bag, which is a device to carry your equipment to the field and bring animals back.

**John Karger** [00:44:55] You don't waste that animal. Whatever the bird doesn't eat, you eat with them. You clean that up. You eat some of it. I was always taught you don't kill something unless you're going to eat it. It just drove that home: what my parents taught me.

**John Karger** [00:45:12] And so, yes, Emory taught me that and started it. And he was up in age.

**John Karger** [00:45:25] My sister and I are some years apart, and so she doesn't know much about that. But it was a very wonderful neighborhood in downtown San Antonio where there were lots that were larger, and they had pecan trees and peach trees and orchards. And it wasn't a beautiful, luscious spot, but it was a nice spot. And people still then raised a lot of their own food in the backyard.

**John Karger** [00:45:50] So he had the ability. This man was a blacksmith. He was a ... he hit all the boxes. He was a blacksmith. He did some boatwright work. He was retired and he had these birds. And this was now his hobby, his sport.

**John Karger** [00:46:09] So, I was around him until I was about 14. But during that period, I'd also been introduced to Dr. Mainster, Dr. Vice and a hair bit later, after he passed away, I was introduced to Peter Cragg, and all those and all the falconers.

**John Karger** [00:46:27] Falconry is a tight community. Once you find falconers and you, they know that you're not just, "Oh, I love birds kind of a person", they'll hand you the information you need, and reaffirm what you can read in the books. So that's where he was at - just a good mentor. But it was only the beginning.

**David Todd** [00:46:57] Well, this is something I'm curious about. You mentioned this community, this circle of falconers. And of course, there's Emory and then Dr. Cragg. Were there others that that you might point to who were particularly helpful?

**John Karger** [00:47:15] Oh, when you meet one falconer. You know, they're pretty much loners when it comes to hunting their birds, because even the old books write about the fact that they don't like to share where their rabbit fields are. You know, they don't like to tell you where they're honey hole is, like a fisherman would say.

**John Karger** [00:47:37] They, at that time, there was, I think, if I remember correctly, there were about 900 falconers in the entire United States. And even today, I think there are less, less than 5000 falconers in the entire United States. So it's still a very small group.

**John Karger** [00:48:00] But yes, there were some. I was introduced at Texas A&M to a now veterinarian, Dr. Mark Hitchcock, who's a falconer. I was introduced through Emory to a host of people that were falconers. And then, later on, there was Fernando Holesnyder. Gosh, it's hard to even name all of them. But I mean, it's not like a dozen of them. But at the same time, you had flashes of your life with them because these guys were loners and they would only trust you if another falconer trusted you.

**John Karger** [00:48:44] So a lot of my falconry work was done with Peter, and when I went to A&M with him, through Mark Hitchcock, a fellow over in Uvalde - name is Sandy Horowitz, Dr. Horowitz, I met him. He's very practiced and probably going to retire soon as a veterinarian and falconer.

**John Karger** [00:49:08] So, you get introduced to this little private club. And they're also hunters. They're also field people, outdoorsmen. And so you get exposed to a lot of outdoor fieldwork. Yes, you know, for example, Mark Hitchcock. Oh, my goodness. He had a red-tailed hawk that was just a ball of fire. And unfortunately, imprinted to people, and it gave me a good education on why you do not imprint animals to you.

**John Karger** [00:49:44] When they imprint to you they're either want to take you as a relative that's competing, another bird that is competing with the territory. Or they want to breed with you. And there's not much good that comes from sexually imprinted animals. And this bird pounded me a bunch of times from behind. And grabbed onto me.

**John Karger** [00:50:15] You don't raise birds so that they see you when they're growing up as your parents or siblings or another bird. Huge learning curve there.

**John Karger** [00:50:28] And so, you know what you learn from these guys. Again, this is the school of hard knocks, you know, and that's where it came from.

**David Todd** [00:50:40] So, it seems that there's this tight circle of falconers that really understand and appreciate these birds of prey. But unfortunately, many folks just don't understand and follow what these birds' role is. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about some of the efforts to protect them, you know, in the larger community, and there are bunch of statutes and so on, and if you could reference any of those, that'd be great. If not, you know, just maybe talk about the change in the culture, you know, that folks seem to appreciate these birds more as time goes on, at least from what I can tell. Could you walk through any of this with me, like the Bald Eagle Protection Act?

**John Karger** [00:51:40] Yes, I will. I will tell you that two of the real higher-up professionals that I dealt with was a fellow named Dr. Grainger Hunt, who was a Ph.D., and he did a lot of research and influenced me to go with and be involved with beginning in trying to save the aplomado falcon.

**John Karger** [00:52:07] And, you know, I'm going to have a little brain fart here. Sorry, but I had it on my mind as we were talking, but oh, I know. Dr. Hunt and a fellow by the name of Tom Maechtle, M-A-E-C-H-T-L-E, Maechtle, who was with the Peregrine Fund at the time. And they connected with me. I connected with them because I had contacts when we were trying to save the peregrine falcon, which peregrine falcon was listed as endangered in the seventies, and they didn't have enough people.

**John Karger** [00:52:51] Parks and Wildlife Department didn't have enough people to start doing surveys which were mandated upon them by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It hasn't changed today, you know, unfunded mandates and it passes, it goes dribbles downhill.

**John Karger** [00:53:07] So, I was connected into Dr. Hunt through Peter Cragg and other falconers because he was doing this aplomado work. And then as the Peregrine Fund started rolling and developing, they needed people that would do surveys and census.

**John Karger** [00:53:24] And so the view when I was growing up, is they were all, everything, you know, it's the same old view of today, you know, the only good snake is a dead snake. It's a lack of understanding. It's ignorance.

**John Karger** [00:53:37] And with birds of prey it was, there's only one species of bird of prey, that "damn chickenhawk", you know, steals my chickens.

**John Karger** [00:53:46] Well, what I was taught by all these people, over and over, was they don't wake up in the morning angry, you know, they don't wake up vicious. They wake up hungry. And they wake up with a task that we as humans living on this earth have really gotten far away from.

**John Karger** [00:54:03] No, I should not be that broad. I should say in my country, we have gotten very far away from. They wake up to do their job of nature's checks and balances.

**John Karger** [00:54:14] They were taught that you catch this which protects the environment, keeps it healthy. You catch ... they were wonderfully built, whether you believe in God or science, however you believe, they were built to endure what they were going to eat, which wasn't well, but they didn't get those diseases.

**John Karger** [00:54:35] There's a reason for that. Their body temperature can be 110 degrees, and maybe go higher when they get anxious and working hard.

**John Karger** [00:54:49] So, that attitude towards them, at that time, was they're just vermin, varmints, and you kill them all.

**John Karger** [00:54:58] So with that, biologists, and there's a difference in a game biologist and non-game biologist, but biologists that were respected in general started seeing a decline of populations, especially with DDT, a chemical that was put out to kill off insects off of plants and uptick the amount of food we can produce in this country. Did a great job.

**John Karger** [00:55:32] But we found out in the sixties that, late fifties and sixties, that it wasn't going away. So in the seventies or earlier, actually late sixties - I was involved with these people and so I went into nests with people looking to band birds or looking to acquire falconry birds. And there were birds that were dying, and eggs that were unhatched and undeveloped.

**John Karger** [00:56:03] And so, as people began to research this, they found this DDT and DDE. And it became the bellwether, saying, "Hey, you know, this is the coal miner's bird."

**John Karger** [00:56:21] And birds of prey became pretty important, started to become important, because they're, of course, apex predators, top of the food chain right there with you and I. What happens to them is going to happen to us.

**John Karger** [00:56:34] They're smaller. So, it gives us a chance to save our children if we figure out what the heck's going on with them.

**John Karger** [00:56:38] So, peregrines, bald eagles. Golden eagles were put on to the Bald Eagle Protection Act not so much that they were endangered, but today there are some thoughts that their population is fairly low because, again, there are some people who have a "shoot, shovel, and shut up" attitude that, you know, these things are taking my animals.

**John Karger** [00:57:09] And that is a vicious circle. They're taking my animals. And so I'm going to protect my land and protect my livestock, so they'll get rid of them.

**John Karger** [00:57:18] And I think they have a right to protect what they're trying to take care of.

**John Karger** [00:57:22] However, I'm not going to teach my grandchildren to kill everything just because it "is".

**John Karger** [00:57:30] And so, the law regarding bald eagles was passed in the sixties and it has grown and changed a lot. The original law essentially protected bald eagles and they added golden eagles because, at a juvenile age, bald eagles are dark in color. They're, to a bird person, you can tell them right away, but to an average person, a juvenile bald eagle and a juvenile golden eagle look pretty close to being the same.

**John Karger** [00:58:07] So, they put both those species underneath of that protection and umbrella. And there was some very high fines for killing them. They protected them. They protected the nest, protected their territories. And so that law helped slow down, by eliminating DDT out of the system. And thus, the birds of prey today, DDE, some of the really more harsh chemicals that were out there, we humans learned that, "Gosh, it's affecting us, too."

**John Karger** [00:58:52] And it's not until it affects us or our children that we're going to stop.

**John Karger** [00:58:59] You know, we still sell DDT to, I believe, I may be wrong, and somebody call me out, but I believe we still sell DDT to other countries.

**John Karger** [00:59:12] So, birds that are on migration, they still get a dose of it.

**John Karger** [00:59:16] And so, that law was put in place. You could not shoot them. You could not harass them. You could not tear down a nest. You couldn't collect them.

**John Karger** [00:59:30] They even protected the feathers, parts, pieces. The only people who have the rights for it is the Native Americans. And they have the right for their religious ceremonies and their living ceremonies.

**John Karger** [00:59:45] There are permits available today, but this is how I was saying that the law has been amended sometimes to try to fit. You know, a law, sometimes is enacted, and then you've got to go back and make it fit.

**John Karger** [00:59:58] But, you know, scientists needed access. So, there are scientific collection permits. And there are Native American permits. And there are, today, graciously there are educational permits. And so, the law has been amended a little bit.

**John Karger** [01:00:12] And of course, bald eagles were taken off the endangered list. And they're on the threatened list, but not on the high threat list. And that's all due to, you know, the government didn't save those birds. Government biologists, state or federal, didn't save those birds. They may have participated some, but they were drug into that business because they had to. Laws came out.

**John Karger** [01:00:37] It was private individuals who had an interest - you know, amateur biologists and scientists like myself and professional biologists and scientists who then compared to today regarding the environment, realized this is a detrimental situation and we've got to do something about it.

**John Karger** [01:00:58] So, the laws for birds of prey today is that you cannot, without some type of a permit, you cannot deal with them. You can't collect the feathers. You can't collect the bodies. You can't make jewelry out of them. You can't harass them. You can't kill them.

**John Karger** [01:01:19] The law has flexed a little bit. For example, we get a call every year that red-shouldered hawks are harassing people in a neighborhood, which is a direct effect of bird feeders. You know, they figure out that white-winged doves, the largest population of white-winged doves, I think, in South Texas, is in San Antonio. And they figure out like, gosh, this is just a grocery store of birds sitting at this feeder here, and I'm going to hang out here and I'll build a nest and raise my family here and I'm going to be protected.

**John Karger** [01:01:49] And so, there was recently in your town, in Austin, somebody was bloodied by red-shouldered hawks. I didn't get called on that one, but my answer to them would have been the same thing that was printed. Give it a few weeks. Tolerate them. Here's what they eat. They eat lots of snakes, lots of insects. They're very much more beneficial than the inconvenience that you have.

**John Karger** [01:02:11] And I don't know exactly what path they took, but I would have said, "Get yourself an umbrella." You can predict where it's coming from: go around that area. It's a little inconvenience, but the benefit is so high.

**John Karger** [01:02:28] And if you can convince a person to not be selfish, to share the world, it's a much better world.

**John Karger** [01:02:34] But the laws are there to protect those birds. And in a way they've been affected by life today, you can get a permit to eliminate an eagle. You can get a permit to eliminate a bird of prey.

**John Karger** [01:02:49] Sometimes I think it's kind of sad. They put a dollar value. For example, you, our government today is giving graces to... We always fall back on the greater good. Who's the greater good? You and I, humans. We have the voice. We have a brain. We're the most important animal on the earth.

**John Karger** [01:03:10] We don't recognize we're animals too often, but we are.

**John Karger** [01:03:13] And because of that, in quotes, "greater good", the law has been amended. So we've dealt with permits.

**John Karger** [01:03:22] That said, we don't want these vultures next to our school. They stink. They might spread disease (that's ignorant) to our children. They might come down and attack our children. So we've eliminated nest sites. And maybe pulled some chicks out of there and raise them and release them.

**John Karger** [01:03:39] Our red-shouldered hawks or Cooper's hawks, whatever bird it is. Bald eagles, we've, you know, today we take bald eagles out of nests when they have had problems or unfortunately, when you're going to put in a subdivision and you've got a bald eagle nesting there, they're going to lose out.

**John Karger** [01:04:00] So, you know, we've done some mitigation there and now. Sometimes it's troubling to me, but that's the way the laws have been bent to make it work for the total society. And I suspect that has to be done.

**John Karger** [01:04:14] But the law still is very, very straightforward. You really can't go out and just shoot a bird because it's there in your backyard. You can't shoot that bird of prey.

**John Karger** [01:04:24] You can claim that you thought it might go after your chicken, but if you don't have the evidence, you'd better be prepared for a law officer to stand at your door and talk to you about it.

**David Todd** [01:04:35] So, I read, and this may be a number of years ago, that raptors, including hawks and owls at one point had bounties on them for folks to get rewarded if they brought in a dead bird. Is that true?

**John Karger** [01:04:54] Yes. Yes. You know, today, it's done with, and probably deservedly so with our hog problem in the state of Texas. It is a population that really needs to be managed. But it is still true with coyotes, raccoons, bobcats, mountain lions. Some of these animals are not protected. And there are local citizens, rural, local citizens, who offer a bounty for every pelt or every thing that you bring in, and birds of prey were included in that until the laws were passed to protect them.

**John Karger** [01:05:36] And it used to drive me crazy to be up in the Hill Country, or anywhere, in a ranching area and see coyotes hanging on a fence line. Same as a, you know, a catfish skull or a bobcat hanging by its back leg or a...

**John Karger** [01:06:02] Our governor, when I was young, tried to get a law passed to, well, I'm going to get in trouble for this. He tried to get a law passed where he could deplete eagles, golden eagles, because they were, and they do, they go after sheep and goats and they will do damage. And there are birds, just like there are humans that take the easy path in life and they need to be dealt with.

**John Karger** [01:06:35] But animals lose, the lower animals, lose all the time because they don't have a voice. They can't get a conversation with a judge or with a lawyer. So they lose for the greater good.

**John Karger** [01:06:49] So, yes, there were bounties paid on them. And that really started, that fell right into the loss of birds with DDT. Populations were dropping tremendously. And quite honestly, when I mentioned about government not doing it, it's always been that way. You know, even when it really comes down to it, it's going to be you and I.

**John Karger** [01:07:13] And falconers, you know, they had their they had their, their own wants. And they would go to a bird nest and pick out a bird and fly it before there were laws protecting them. It was not against the law. So you spotted this hawk nest. You waited for the right time.

**John Karger** [01:07:33] You picked that bird out when it was just getting ready to fly off the nest. We called it a "brancher" because it was hanging out on the branches away from the nest. And you picked that bird. And you picked the size of the bird. Female or male - males or smaller, for the prey that was available. And if you're going to hunt cottontail or small prey you get a smaller bird.

**John Karger** [01:07:56] They had their own wants, and so they saw these birds dying at the nest, and then they saw the populations dropping down. So people began to make a stink and protesting about it and writing to their government about it. So the laws were passed for protection.

**John Karger** [01:08:17] And unfortunately, today, for the greater good, wind generators are going to kill a lot of birds, and they do kill a lot of birds. And solar farms. All those good things that are good for us, for our environment, we're finding out that, you know, birds go over a solar farm, it's so doggone hot that they vaporize.

**John Karger** [01:08:41] And bats go through a wind generator. They don't just die. They don't get whacked by the blade, and I'm sure this happens with raptors, too, they don't they don't just die and hit the ground. They literally get their front side sucked through their back side because of the vortex that's going on there.

**John Karger** [01:09:03] And now our government is fluctuating a little and you're going to pay a fee to the government and they're going to give you a permit or grace period of so many birds. You know, we've looked at it. And I hope they do the right studies that says we can lose this percentage of birds.

**John Karger** [01:09:22] And so for the greater good, you're going to generate electricity and we're not going to file on you for killing of golden eagles and bald eagles and other hawks and falcons and other animals through things that we are trying to do to clean up our environment. Everything has a repercussion.

**John Karger** [01:09:49] Speaking of repercussions, in our little neighborhood, we had a problem with young screech owls being found dead. And some of the speculation was that it was warfarin or some other kind of rodenticide that was contaminating mice and rats, and then these young small birds were getting a dose and dying as a result. And of course, that's just an anecdote from the neighborhood. But do you think there's some truth to that?

**John Karger** [01:10:27] My wife is a veterinarian and a highly accomplished veterinarian. I met her before she was a veterinarian and she apprenticed under me for falconry. And I got her introduced - it's just the repeating of history - I got her introduced to veterinarians and kind of helped her along, you know, in the world of veterinary medicine and started her on that, helped start her on that path. I didn't have much to do with it. She was born to be a vet.

**John Karger** [01:10:56] But, I will tell you that she helps answer these questions. And we always try to first get people to use some other methods of rodent control. One of the easiest, for example, is in your own backyard, even a tight backyard, when you trim tree limbs, build yourself a little compost pile. Doesn't have to be very big - three foot by three foot. Throw all those limbs over there. And then throw all your biodegradable foods that, you know, are not going to cause a big stink, you know - leftover lettuce, banana peels and that kind of stuff.

**John Karger** [01:11:31] What it does is it makes an area for rats and mice to go to. And you don't have to put out as much poison because they're not going to come in. You know, if you keep your house clean around the edges, bushes, the grounds. Don't leave piles of lumber. You're not going to attract the unsociable animals we don't like termites and mice and rats.

**John Karger** [01:11:55] And just because you happen to see them doesn't mean you should put out poison either.

**John Karger** [01:12:00] And so, there are poisons out there that you can buy that once the animal has eaten them, it is absorbed into the animal. This is what my wife tells people. Once it's absorbed into the target animal, it is no longer a danger to the secondary animal.

**John Karger** [01:12:19] And it's one of the reasons that today, for example, they're having a hard time trying to figure out how they're going to manage wild hogs. They have come up with systems where they're trying to figure out how, OK, we're going to put out this box feeder. How are we going to keep other animals from eating out of it? And how are we going to attract the hog, and what are we going to put in there so it doesn't, when the animal dies, other predators don't come along and die from it too?

**John Karger** [01:12:48] I mean, I've testified in cases where - west Texas, north Texas - any place where somebody is pushed to make their taxes on their land. Get desperate. That's where somebody put up antifreeze in a tub. Coyotes came there and drank and of course they died. But the animals that eat the coyotes, they die too.

**John Karger** [01:13:14] So, back to your rat and mouse situation. Yes, I think what's amazing to me is we can go to a outlet and buy chemicals that a person who has a business can't get their hands on, because I think they kind of figure that it's in small quantities. So, you know, we let the capitalistic ideas work and they're able to sell it. And I don't have a problem with that. I'm not pointing, poking at them, but I'm just saying it's the way our system works. So, in small quantities, you can buy chemicals, golly, rat poisons, for example, that it does kill screech owls. It does kill a bird of prey.

**John Karger** [01:14:05] I apologize for my long answers. But I just feel that we don't have enough information to the average person. And I think I've found that if I just take a little bit of time, and unless they're just totally not interested and living for themselves, they'll walk away. But most people, they are delighted to hear that information.

**David Todd** [01:14:26] No, absolutely. I mean, I think that we're trying to deal with really complicated, complex questions. And I appreciate you taking the time to give us the answers and the detail that they deserve. So thank you.

**David Todd** [01:14:41] Well, so you have not been sitting on the sidelines to all these issues. And I was hoping that you could talk about this organization that you've been with and that you actually founded - Last Chance Forever, The Bird of Prey Conservancy - back in 1978, now serving as executive director. I was hoping you could tell us how the group got started and what sort of activities and goals it's had.

**John Karger** [01:15:15] Out of high school and in the school of hard knocks, University of Life, being a veterinary technician, I always wanted to work for the State of Texas or Park and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, in some capacity. It was my dream. I worked for the Parks and Wildlife Department as a junior biologist, a field biologist.

**John Karger** [01:15:40] And so, I'm just kind of going off my track that second. Ask me again.

**David Todd** [01:15:59] Oh, I was just hoping that you could help us understand the origins of Last Chance Forever.

**John Karger** [01:16:05] Okay, I am so sorry. I just got a little distracted there.

**John Karger** [01:16:10] And so out of high school, being around all of these people, and having this kind of influence scientifically, I was working for Southwest Research Institute.

**John Karger** [01:16:24] You know, falconers, for them, it has not changed. It is such an unusual art and sport. And there are so few of us. That you get sucked into a part of society that has an interest in you. And I, through contacts with Dr. Vice and such, I got a call and they were doing, Southwest Research, was beginning a research project that was researching the abilities of animals.

**John Karger** [01:17:01] This was during a period when we didn't have really good satellite data. About the best we could do was fly a satellite over an area and take a photograph or fly an airplane. And then I had an uncle that was an interpreter of photographs, and he would look at those photographs and they would essentially figure out what the heck was going on around the world, you know. But he was part of figuring out that there was nuclear rockets sitting being and being put together in Cuba.

**John Karger** [01:17:37] But Southwest Research was doing a study in their bioengineering department. They wanted to know how far birds could see. How far could they fly? How high could they fly? What could they discriminate? How much weight could they carry? What could they do when they got there? That was their questions.

**John Karger** [01:18:02] And how are you going to find someone who knows how to handle these birds? Dr. Mainster and Dr. Vice were veterinary advisors to Southwest Research Institute and Southwest Medical Foundation. So they said we got just the guy. So I got hired at Southwest Research to be a technician. We acquired birds of prey legally through the permitting system. It was kind of loose, but we acquired a bunch of birds out of the nest and started raising them properly because they didn't know how to do it. They tried a little bit of it, but did not know how to take care of them.

**John Karger** [01:18:40] So, I brought in my good friends, one of the falconers, I did not mention. It was Dr. Leo Tynan. He's a childhood friend. He's a veterinarian in Fredericksburg, excuse me, a medical doctor, in Fredericksburg, Texas. Dr. Tynan and I were introduced at a young age when I brought my friends back in. Dr. Tynan wasn't a doctor yet. Peter Cragg was a veterinarian, but he wasn't practicing yet. He wasn't finished out of school yet. And so I brought them in.

**John Karger** [01:19:08] And the three of us started working on this project. We got red-tailed hawks to fly up out of sight. Drive ten miles down the road. Throw out a target that we taught them to learn. On that target was food. And out of nowhere - you couldn't see them with binoculars - ten miles down the road. They'd come down and land.

**John Karger** [01:19:33] And we figured out all those questions that they were asking. At the time, it was pretty classified, but they just, I just surprisingly saw a year ago that they had declassified a lot of that information because they don't need it anymore. They've got satellites. It does everything. They can see you blink your eye.

**John Karger** [01:19:56] They wanted to find out what these capabilities were. We had a peregrine falcon on a boat in California. We were ten miles off the shore and the earth begins

(I know some people don't believe this), but the earth does begin to curve. And with the curvature of the earth, you begin to lose the shoreline.

**John Karger** [01:20:16] And we had these peregrine falcons that again, were trained to a target. It's just like training them to a lure. A lure is a bird-shaped object (to lure means to call). So you teach your bird of prey that you don't want them to always come to your hand for food. You teach them to come down to something that looks natural.

**John Karger** [01:20:35] So, it was just a different kind of lure. We taught them to it.

**John Karger** [01:20:39] And at ten miles, they would sit on a boat, quietly watching the shoreline. And by radio, I would say to someone, show the target. They'd put their foot down and focus their eyes. They have to focalize their eyes by moving their head, because they can't move their eyes and head like you and I do. And zoom. They would take off. And they'd fly that ten miles faster than I could go in a speeding twin-engine boat following them. And land at that target - ten miles away! Target was no more than 18 inches by 18 inches.

**John Karger** [01:21:15] Thus, it's published today that they can see a mouse at a mile. We didn't discover that. Other scientists, along with the work we were doing, they found out that raptors have. I think we have 100, about 100,000 focal points in our eyes and birds of prey have a million. So it's ten times more powerful. So they can see a mouse a mile away.

**John Karger** [01:21:38] But during that period, it didn't change. We had game wardens who figured out we were there. And, I predict in the future, game wardens will no longer be game wardens. They will have to be called "wildlife officers". Because they're going to have to adapt and get more biology involved. Yes, they will have to promote and administer the laws for protection. But they're also going to have to have more information about how all this wildlife interacts. So in the future, I don't think we're going to have, we'll have wildlife officers that have the ability to arrest you for breaking a wildlife law, but they're going to also understand how wild animals function in our world today.

**John Karger** [01:22:29] They don't get much education on that. That's not their fault. But they're just, that's just not the direction they're in right now. They're getting better. I mean, they've really improved over the many, many, many, many years that I've been involved with them.

**John Karger** [01:22:42] But, so, the game wardens would bring ... they didn't know what to do. The law said that they couldn't just, unless this animal was suffering, they couldn't dispatch this hawk on the side of the road. And they had some passion.

**John Karger** [01:22:56] I mean, the state doesn't put any, and the feds don't put much money into, in quotes, "rehabilitation". Our organization does not get a single penny from the state or the federal government for doing what we do, typically.

**John Karger** [01:23:07] You know, they sure as hell tell us what to do, but they don't give us anything for it.

**John Karger** [01:23:13] And I just got tired of it. Came home one day disgusted.

**John Karger** [01:23:21] My parents sat me down and said, "You know, why don't we do something for you and the birds?" Because by that time, too, a pretty good, pretty good bill to

feed the birds that I had - not only the birds that I flew for falconry, but the ones I was rescuing and the animals I rescue.

**John Karger** [01:23:37] I knew what I didn't want to do - there was already a person that had wildlife rescue in San Antonio, and it was Lynn Cuny. In fact, she came out of close to my own neighborhood. Lynn's doing a fine job of taking care of all the wild animals. She took care of everything, and we've had kind of, all of our lives, a symbiotic relationship. You know, I don't really take care of raccoons and deer and bobcats and, you know, song birds, shorebirds. I just take care of birds of prey. So we would do that.

**John Karger** [01:24:13] And I did that because my mentor said, "You cannot do it all. Do it and make a difference or don't do it at all." And I chose raptors, because they're my most interesting species, and I practice falconry.

**John Karger** [01:24:28] So, game wardens would bring us injured birds and they didn't know what to do with them. But the law said they had to be protected. And I ended up getting, we had to have a permit to have those birds for Southwest Research. So, I ended up getting a rehabilitation permit. They didn't even know much about that. And so my permit is 002. That tells you how I'm an old guy.

**John Karger** [01:24:58] So, we were issued a permit to take them in, care for them, put them back in the wild. They trusted us to do that.

**John Karger** [01:25:05] But when I came home, I was pretty disgusted because some people's attitude is, "Well, I was just going to shoot if you didn't take it." And I always bit at the guilt hook and took them on. Some we made it and some we didn't. Got better at it.

**John Karger** [01:25:24] So, my parents said, "Why don't we start something for you? Separate off your moneys." And I wasn't making a lot of money, but, you know, let's make it official. So my parents and myself were the first board members. My father was the president. My mother was the secretary and treasurer and myself, the executive director. And then I added in Dr. Hickey, and we started Last Chance Forever when Dr. Hickey passed away. Last Chance Forever started in my house, got the permit, named the organization.

**John Karger** [01:25:58] And the reason it was named Last Chance Forever is that I had a golden eagle that was given to me from the zoo. They that had a, the zoo had a philosophy that they only liked to keep breeding populations, because their statement was that we're a vessel for trying to save species. And they had a single female golden eagle. They didn't want her. I shouldn't say that. That sounds harsh. They were trying to find a home for her.

**John Karger** [01:26:22] So I did a little research, talking to friends and it's not the truth. But I was told during that period that eagles could live to be 100 years of age. They could probably live to be 50 or more. But when someone says to you a hundred years, to a younger person, My God, that's forever. So I called her, "Forever". You know, I used to say it's Forever's, this is Forever's chance.

**John Karger** [01:26:49] So, when they said, "What are we gonna call this organization?" I came up with, I just flipped it around - Last Chance Forever, which I immediately got hell from my English teacher in high school who called me and said, "You can't do it. That's a double negative." I said, "I can do whatever I want to do." And I'm sure she just shook her head, and was like, "So typical of him, you know."

**John Karger** [01:27:15] So we started. But in 1978, it was formed. Got a guy that was interested, and he helped us with the accounting. His name was Chris Sorenson, jumped in there and said, "I'll help you at little to no cost." Found a lawyer who was a birder. And his name was John Economidy. He still practices today. He said, "I'll help you write up the paperwork.

**John Karger** [01:27:45] Had to have board members. We did that and we started. Shortly thereafter, a few years, my father died. So, my mother and I discussed it and I went out and found my friends that are still today my board members, which to some extent has been detrimental in some areas because there's a style that some of the foundations and donors want you to have. They want you to change your board members every two years because they bring, I get the picture, they bring lots of information and lots of contacts to.

**John Karger** [01:28:22] But I felt like we weren't going to get a dang thing done, because you're changing people out all the time, and they all bring different ideas. And I wanted people who believed in me. Peter Krause is one of our board members. He was someone that as a youngster he was hanging around all of us. He did not fly birds of prey, but he was a photographer as a youngster. And we shot pictures together and he's on our board.

**John Karger** [01:28:51] Dr. Leo Tynan is on our board. We flew birds together at, I don't know, 12, 14 years of age. Fellow by name of Ron Kipp is on the board. He is a, at the time, was a zoologist at the San Antonio Zoo. I felt that was a good contribution.

**John Karger** [01:29:11] Later on, we put a fellow by the name of Jim Suggs on board who is an architect but he was designing buildings that fit into the environment and had a small impact. And footprint was not hurting the environment. I thought that was a good pick.

**John Karger** [01:29:32] And then Melissa Hill, Dr. Melissa Hill, being a veterinarian, became the president.

**John Karger** [01:29:39] And you've got a board. And they don't get a penny from me or the organization. I do my best to take care of them, but they do it graciously. And over the years as a board, that has not changed.

**John Karger** [01:29:53] By God, we have accomplished a lot of good things because we could move fast. We could we could move fast and make decisions. And they all believed in me. I'm sure that when I die, that somebody is going to stand up and say, "He was just a chubby little kid with a bucket full of owls. It hasn't changed much with a crazy idea that he, he constantly said, I don't know where the dream came from, but I know where it has to go."

**John Karger** [01:30:28] So, they've believed in me and they've let me run this thing and I've made a few dumb decisions I learned from, but most of the time we have made it survive. And today we see 240 to 300 birds of prey a year. We have a budget of 180 to \$200,000 a year, which isn't much money. But we're very efficient with it.

**John Karger** [01:31:01] We have a 60 to 65% honest ... you know, when you educate yourself to the world, you learn what statistics is all about. You can twist that around any way you want. But honestly, with a dead-on stare to the young man that's in my facility that helps me with that, who's been with me for over 20 years now. We manage a 60 to 65% rate of return of birds back into the wild.

**John Karger** [01:31:32] We have a reputation that precedes us around the world. We receive birds from Brazil. We receive birds from Mexico. We've done things for the U.S. government that they were in a pickle and they didn't know what to do. I recently got contacted by Fish and Wildlife Service. Unfortunately, they're shutting down a zoo in one of our outside lying countries, and they're trying to get those animals placed. They want to know if we can help them with a bald eagle and a couple of other eagles that were there.

**John Karger** [01:32:03] So, we got a really good reputation. And all of it is based around science, quality conservation attitude, trying to fit in with the world, and common sense. So Last Chance Forever has survived since 1978 with a 501(c)(3) designation statement. And our articles of incorporation say that we're supposed to take care of birds of prey, help wildlife conservation, keep open land, and promote all of that.

**John Karger** [01:32:47] And we by golly, we have done it. If we all were to die tomorrow, well, no one can say that we didn't follow the path of nonsensical. Don't get me wrong, passion needs to be involved. We're passionate too, but nonsensical, undriven, undirected, common-sense conservation. Our common-sense conservation was set up to contribute to the wild population and help humans live a better life, along with the animals.

**David Todd** [01:33:25] Well, a wonderful mission and a great legacy.

**David Todd** [01:33:30] So, you mentioned this large number, what, 240, 300 birds a year. I'm curious what brings most of these birds to your facility for care and rehabilitation and eventual release?

**John Karger** [01:33:47] From the very beginning, and it is still that way today, today, people are much more educated with the Internet. So they go searching for places to find something. But really, it's word of mouth. For the most part, there are people who are permitted in the state of Texas to have eagles. But when eagles were first discovered, I mean, I had this bird from the zoo and I was the only guy.

**John Karger** [01:34:12] I don't know whether I was intelligent or not, because it's a very formidable animal, has the ability to squeeze extremely hard with extremely large talons. And I got roughed up pretty good by them. And I've got the scars to show it, not because they're mean, because they know and understand one thing: humans are some of the nastiest animals in the world, and they will take advantage of you. And you'd better protect yourself.

**John Karger** [01:34:36] So, they're going to protect themselves. And you better learn to get into their head, get into their world, and teach them that you're there and appreciative. So I took care of a lot of eagles, and today I still take care of eagles. So because of that, my reputation has gotten out of our success.

**John Karger** [01:34:54] I've shaped the, we have shaped the way that Fish and Wildlife agents and the way the state game wardens look at things. We're trying to shape it even more that it's not a matter of dumping animals someplace to get some help because you don't know what to do with them. You can make a choice now.

**John Karger** [01:35:11] And I try to get some of the people that are coming into wildlife rehabilitation to understand that networking is what it's all about. It's not about an ego, of I take care of this, or I have these kind of animals. Because I've been called that. "Oh, you're,

you're a raptor specialist. You're an elitist." No, I just couldn't do it with all of the wildlife. I couldn't feed them all. Couldn't provide the proper care. I couldn't provide the proper caging, housing, medical work. I didn't feel like I was succeeding.

**John Karger** [01:35:49] So, with one species, I can see, I can quantify, whether I'm failing or I've got to change and adapt, or I'm unsuccessful.

**John Karger** [01:36:00] So, around the state, by word of mouth, people bring us birds. Also, they read about us on the Internet.

**John Karger** [01:36:10] And then also we have another component with educational programming. And I have the ability to talk to people. I don't think I have the brainpower to begin thinking immediately about the scientific side of it. And what's this? This is a *Tyto alba*. Or, you know, a bald eagle, that's *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*. And talk from that angle. And people start yawning and walk away.

**John Karger** [01:36:44] I just try to tell them what I've experienced, and what these birds do with each one of their lives, and how they fit into our, function in our life and affect us.

**John Karger** [01:36:54] So, our educational programs are focused towards common-sense conservation ability. Anybody with common sense can take a look at this and you've got a screech owl in your backyard and you go out every night and open the spigot to sprinkle your yard and this thing comes out WHAP, hits you on the back of the head.

**John Karger** [01:37:17] Well, I'm there to try to teach you that that's actually a great thing. It means that your environment is pretty clean and there are critters there and that bird's there. However, you stepped into its domain and it's just like somebody walking over your fence, you'd be protective. I have a chance to talk to them. That's on an individual basis.

**John Karger** [01:37:38] And then on a big basis, we started doing, I asked Parks and Wildlife Department for permission to have some educational birds which were non-releasable birds. And we ended up with some birds that couldn't fly, but we still taught them with falconry how to stand on the glove graciously and keep them in very good shape, featherwise, explain why they've got a crooked wing or whatever is going on with them.

**John Karger** [01:38:04] We never drag them. And you know what I found out? I've always had a statement that said, "Beware of the ones who drag around the wolves to make money." And I always attributed that to Aldo Leopold, but I can't find it. I searched. I've searched all of his books. I've searched on the Internet. I don't think he ever said it.

**John Karger** [01:38:27] So, I think I must have dreamt it. I must, I can be called a liar now because I don't think he said it, but I do say it all the time. I'll still give him the credit, because my own ethic sees people out there who are using these things because they're oddities and they're feeding their egos and they're, "Look at me, I've got this, and you can't. You're down there. And I get to have this animal."

**John Karger** [01:38:56] That's not what we're all about. And we're not about bringing out a bird with a broken wing and saying, "Look at this poor buddy, buddy little bird. Isn't, that horrible? Now give me some money."

**John Karger** [01:39:08] We're not going to do that. If you want to, if you want to make a donation at that time, that's wonderful. If you want to research us afterwards where you can find us on the world's largest library, that's wonderful. If you ask questions to people and you find out by word of mouth and want to support us, that's fantastic.

**John Karger** [01:39:27] So, our educational programs have become very popular. And every once and a while we have people slip in, and they do programs, and they don't, people don't hire us. We don't sell out the programs. We ask for a donation for it. And we've got a schedule and we say, "Look, this is what it costs us - costs us fuel, costs us time, preparation. This is what we'd like to get." And we don't have much problem with people. They understand it these days.

**John Karger** [01:39:53] And so, that money, that money goes directly into Last Chance Forever's fund. And yes, we do spend some of the money for employees. I am a paid employee, but I would be embarrassed if I told you at the moment what I get paid. Anybody can find it. It's on open public records. My employees take a rate of pay that they know that it's not fantastic. They could work at McDonald's for more money.

**John Karger** [01:40:24] But they know, and they were started out as volunteers, and they know that they're doing something fantastic, and something that's lost today. Having pride in what you do and taking it as part of your job and your pay. I can stand up and then I go to sleep at night knowing I did something good today.

**John Karger** [01:40:47] So, Last Chance Forever functions on these funds and we've built it up. We're now at a point where fortunately we have some really good donors and we have some really good people who I can't say thank you and I love you enough to support us in financial or physical ways.

**John Karger** [01:41:08] So, Last Chance Forever grew out of my backyard. First place it went to was Incarnate Word convent in San Antonio because a woman who was on their board who happened to be one of the, a huge animal rights, humane person, not so much animal rights, but humane person. I sat her and her lady friends down and said, "Listen, ladies, I take care of birds of prey, and animals die so that birds can survive. And I'm not going to feed them hamburger and I am not going to feed them dog food. And I'm having a hard time because I'm growing out of my backyard and I really need a bigger place."

**John Karger** [01:41:53] So, she talked to the convent. And the nuns didn't understand. They didn't know what it was all about. But, they had this barn. I built into that barn and the grounds around it. They weren't using it. It was just getting trashed up. So that's where the first facility outside of my backyard, which I knew I had to get out of my backyard because, you know, you don't do as good a work when you're there 24 hours a day.

**John Karger** [01:42:18] When those animals are on your back 24 hours a day, and you're on those animals back 24 hours a day, living your life in your own house, you do not do as focused a job. I realized that.

**John Karger** [01:42:30] So, I looked for a place. So, we went to this convent. Well, the convent, eventually we grew bigger than that, and they had other plans. And so we moved from there. This same lady made contacts through her and other people, and next place I landed was St. Mary's Hall, a girls' school. So I went from nuns to private school girls. And there were some boys there eventually.

**John Karger** [01:42:58] And they had a little chunk of land, and I traded out with them. ... It was a shake-hand deal. But I'm not a taker. I'm a sharer. And so, I traded out with them doing some educational programs on the grounds. And I couldn't walk across those grounds without those kids glomming onto me, because I had these birds. I had birds up there on the hill. They couldn't really get to them. I had them fenced off, but I would open up that fence every once in a while for classes to come up.

**John Karger** [01:43:33] "Gosh! Look at these birds! Look at this eagle!

**John Karger** [01:43:36] And then I started doing some summertime educational programs for them. And these kids are the cream of the crop. Bright, bright kids. Education is high. But, they didn't have much exposure to what, again, what these animals were all about. So, I stayed there for quite some time and I became one of these people that they were like, "Yeah, that bird guy's up there." And I interacted in their classes.

**John Karger** [01:44:08] But, then we started growing more. And they decided to change their focus a little bit for that piece of property.

**John Karger** [01:44:15] So, I started looking around. One of the former classmates that was there found out about me. At that time, I had an educational program at the San Antonio Zoo. They paid us to do that. They made a donation to Last Chance Forever. So we had a major program there sponsored by Coca-Cola, and we did educational programs in the middle of the zoo.

**John Karger** [01:44:36] And this lady came up to me and she said, "I understand you've got that facility at Last Chance Forever." In fact, one of the ladies is still a supporter. Had children there. Her name was Karen Hixon and her husband, very, very generous people with what money's they have. Karen Hixon has been a pathway person for me, keeping me at St. Mary's Hall and helping support some of the work today. She's one of our good funders.

**John Karger** [01:45:06] But this woman, by the name of Barbara Bowman, came to me at the zoo. She said, "I understand you've got these birds up at St. Mary's Hall, and you need another place." And I said, "Yes." So she said, "I have this little farm that's over off of, by the airport, off of a little road there." She said "I grew up there as a kid because in the afternoon the school bus dropped me off there." It was a horse farm and a guy mentored her there in horseback riding and dressage, until her parents came and got her when they got through with their work and everything. So she was, and today they would say she was a latchkey kid. What a terrible way to generalize things. But I think she learned a heck of a lot from this fellow.

**John Karger** [01:45:54] But, she said, "I bought this place because I loved it." She had some means. She still has means. But she's always had a bent for caring for the animals. And you can find her track record around the world being involved in projects.

**John Karger** [01:46:14] So, over a period of time, we worked out a situation where ... In Texas, I don't know where that happens anywhere else, but in Texas, conservation things sometimes happen with an agreement called a dollar a year for 99 years. The owner of the land gets a tax write-off, because you've got a 501(c)(3). They get some prestigious, you know, feelings from it, because they're helping this organization and they lease this for a dollar a year for 99 years.

**John Karger** [01:46:45] At first, she wanted to sell it to me. I said, "There's no way I can buy that." Then she wanted to rent it to me or lease it to me. And I could not see putting conservation money into that because I'd have to spend a lot of money to adapt this place, even though it was a horse farm. It had some structures on it.

**John Karger** [01:47:03] I built every structure on it that was for birds. I didn't build into any of her, her barns on her side. On the side she had me on. She had a big horse barn there. And I did build eagle pens onto this wonderful barn where she had horse pens in there, and I adapted those and then added on flight cages.

**John Karger** [01:47:25] And that was in 1990. So, from 1990 till now. We have grown it. We fought off the city growing around us. We still have a good mission there. And this lady is still involved.

**John Karger** [01:47:49] Like with all human life, anybody that you have a passionate connection, something, everybody has their ideas. We've had our ups and downs. But down at the bottoms, there is a general love and passion for these birds. And no matter how, in any situation, I get into, how troubled it might be. The base is, take care of these birds. They're first.

**John Karger** [01:48:19] And so, you got to you got to learn to agree to disagree. And we've gotten along and she's been very supportive. So she ended up, we ended up acquiring from her two acres. That's what our facility is on.

**John Karger** [01:48:35] And it's a good place because we're close to the airport. It's easy to get birds in from the airlines. We are centrally located so that people when you ask that question, people will find a bird on Saturday. They could call us and we can give them some instructions. And on Monday when they come to work, they can either bring it when they're going in to San Antonio going into work, or they know somebody going to San Antonio. Give directions and hopefully bring it to us. But we also will go out in time to time, pick up birds.

**John Karger** [01:49:07] We try to bring them into our center. I started doing that a long time ago because I felt like with us spending so much money in quotes, "rescuing" things, that we were spending our time and our money beyond where we could really put the pressure on where it was needed with caring for the birds. And it brings those people in to see, look, this is what these people are doing without state and federal support. Some of them, it generates funds from them. They make a donation and some it just educates them.

**John Karger** [01:49:39] I feel that when I open up the door. There stands a young child with a parent. They got in a box, this bird. You can see the passion of this child's face. They don't want this animal to hurt. Parent doesn't either. Most of us as parents are driven by that child, I mean.

**John Karger** [01:49:59] One of my people I just learned from years ago, his name was Rather Homewood, said, "Ehhh, you can get all the letters behind your name you want, boy, but you ain't gonna teach anybody anything. It's not until you got that kid sitting on that lap, says 'Grandpa, please don't shoot eagles. That's gonna make a difference.'"

**John Karger** [01:50:18] So, probably our education. Probably more impactful. Probably more important than everything we do.

**John Karger** [01:50:28] But you know what? I can't turn my back on those creatures. That one you turn your back on. You don't try to help it. That's the one that probably could have made it.

**John Karger** [01:50:37] And it really has, with my scientific background, my inquiring mind, we've learned a lot about these birds, and we teach people today how to handle them, how to get them in a box, how to get them out of the box.

**John Karger** [01:50:52] We teach other rehabilitation permittees how to protect them. When you get them in, you know, you put protection on their tail because if you let them tear up their feathers in a cage, you're just making more work for yourself.

**John Karger** [01:51:06] How to build the right kind of facility, what kind of fluids to give them, how to kind of immediate triage care at that center. We do that today. So it's, that same side of the education is important also.

**John Karger** [01:51:19] But our educational efforts with the public has grown to the point where I will be leaving in August, the middle of this August, and I'll be headed to Minnesota. I'll be there for 15 days. I'll do 13 days straight of programs three times a day to people at the state fair because the Department of Natural Resources of Minnesota believe in what I do and they love my message.

**John Karger** [01:51:48] And my message is not, "You've got to help these poor little birds. Now, give me money." It's, we're all responsible. We all can make an impact. Let's all get along. Because you know what? When the politicians, when they see it's going down, it's going to be you and me and our division by politics is going to wash away and it's just going to be us together.

**John Karger** [01:52:12] That's what I teach. Some people take it as preaching and they walk away. That's their loss.

**John Karger** [01:52:20] But our education side and our rehabilitation side, both of those complement each other and makes for what I consider a accomplished effort.

**David Todd** [01:52:35] Okay. You know of something I think might be really unfamiliar to a lot of people, and something that maybe you could fill us in on is this rehabilitation side. Can you tell us what sort of injuries, maladies, diseases you commonly see in these birds that come in for your care? And then maybe help us understand what some of your rehabilitation techniques might be for those injured birds?

**John Karger** [01:53:12] Our rehabilitation, again, I'm going to say it many times, is scientifically driven, common-sense driven. We're here to make a difference. And we get birds from people. They find them. And it really fluctuates. We can predict it, but it fluctuates. We'll have a run in the spring because you've got youngsters that fall out of the nest or something's happened, you know. You do have screech owls that come in. They're very sick. We use a technique with charcoal. We clean them out because they have been exposed to pesticides, insecticides, heavy metals. Lead is a huge issue these days.

**John Karger** [01:53:59] But we, our rehabilitation effort is scientifically driven, so we have to triage every case that comes in. So when a bird comes in, let's just say, for example, a game warden calls us and says, 'I got a call from such and such, and they found this bird in the

middle of the highway." We get a lot of worship by car. We get a lot of birds caught in fences. We get a lot of birds that are blown out of the nest by a storm.

**John Karger** [01:54:30] And humans, God love us, we care and we rescue them. You know? A mother deer, the doe says to that baby, "You stay right here. I'm going out and feed and don't you move from there." Human walks up on it in a park or walks up on it in a pasture, walk on to it down the street. And right away, they don't see mama around. And they think, "Oh, my God, it's abandoned, it's orphaned," And they pick it up and scoop it up. And now they don't know what to do with it.

**John Karger** [01:54:56] And in the past and still somewhat today, there are people who try to raise themselves, and then all of a sudden they don't know what they're doing. They've gotten into a real pickle.

**John Karger** [01:55:05] They, I read, I saw something the other day where a lady found a ringtailed cat in the middle of the road, thought it was dead. So she picked it up, put it in her car. And it was stunned. Driving down the road, it comes to life as she's flipping out because this thing is making circles in there at 100 miles an hour. And you know how the story goes on from there.

**John Karger** [01:55:28] But, so we look at every case that comes in and pretty classically, down the line, they've been hit by a car. They've been caught in a fence. They have impacted something. They have fallen out of a nest. They have had some, they've ingested something that has made them ill. They have been found by someone.

**John Karger** [01:55:53] And we try very hard to not get people to pick them up. You know, when it comes to, if they want to do something, because people, my God, they've got to do something.

**John Karger** [01:56:03] For example, during spring, we get a lot of great horned owls, starting about February, and we just tell them, you know, did you save an Easter basket from last year? Get the biggest Easter basket you can get. Go up to a tree near where you found it. Lay a ladder against the tree. Climb up that ladder as high as you could possibly go. Be very safe. And hook that Easter basket on there. And take that little chick, put it in an Easter basket, and then walk away from it. And don't bother it anymore. But put it someplace where you can't see it from your back porch, because you're going to worry over it.

**John Karger** [01:56:36] And what generally happens is that great horned owl will go, "Yip, yip." And Mom says, "Oh, there's junior. He made a mistake, stepped off the edge of the nest." And horned owls usually nest in wide parts of trees or in nests of other birds of prey. And calls back at him. And she ... I had a very educated person call me one day. "You won't believe it. I put that owl in that Easter basket. And now there's two of them in there."

**John Karger** [01:57:07] Because they know that the other bird was branching, hopping around the tree and she talked it over to where the other chick was. They're around. The adults are around. You got to just get them up off the ground so that another predator doesn't take advantage of it. Or, of course, it might have supposed to have been. It might be that nature selected them.

**John Karger** [01:57:25] And we have at that moment, and I'm telling you, we're doing triage, we're trying to make a decision, are we going to make an impact for the population? Are we

doing the right thing or are we just creating something that nature's trying to eliminate. Something wrong with this bird?

**John Karger** [01:57:44] We've got a bald eagle that's got a very crooked beak. His head is narrower. We don't know. And my veterinarian believes differently. Well, she taught me differently. She thinks that head is narrow and that beak is crooked because in the nest there was a period of time when something disturbed it and those parents couldn't roll the eggs. And you roll the eggs so that that embryo can develop properly in that egg. And he laid on his side too long and his beak grew. And that's what caused that.

**John Karger** [01:58:23] I always used to say, "I think mom stepped on him."

**John Karger** [01:58:26] And unfortunately, what nature does is, is he can't eat well. He gets weak. Other birds in the nest are getting stronger. They get into scraps and either the other bird is a Cain and Abel syndrome out of the Bible. Cain is stronger than Abel. And so Cain eats Abel. And Cain kills Abel. Or he gets pushed out of the nest.

**John Karger** [01:58:46] And nature is ... it might be cruel in our eyes, but that's the way it works.

**John Karger** [01:58:50] So, this bird was found by someone, brought to us, and we had to make the determination that, yes, we could give it a life. We could raise it up. But we had to make a decision whether we euthanize it, because I'm not just going to put him in a cage. I'm not going to just put them on exhibit. I'm not going to. That's just not what I'm going to raise them for.

**John Karger** [01:59:14] But we had a place in our educational situation where we could. So we raised this bird up as a wild bird. We used puppets, so they see an eagle feeding them. We wear a sheet over our head. We feed them the prey that mom and dad would have fed them - fish and roadkill, wild, excuse me, live animals. And we raise them up so that they don't see us as their provider.

**John Karger** [01:59:47] But this bird suddenly turns into a bald eagle. But he's got this terribly crooked beak, and he's not going to survive out in the wild. And I don't think it's fair either, knowing in my mind, I don't want to suffer knowing that I released this bird to say I released a bald eagle. But I know, good and well, that it's going to go out and starve to death, a terrible death.

**John Karger** [02:00:14] However, I will occasionally release birds. That they're at the best of the peak of what they can do and they're banging on the door. And every time you open the door, they shoot out the door. And their attitude is, "If you let me out of this cage, I'm going to go find a branch and I'm going to get up higher. And I've shown you in a flight cage that I can capture something running on the ground. Let me out of here."

**John Karger** [02:00:37] And my attitude towards that is any day out of my cages, is better than any day, any day out there outside of my cages is better than a day inside.

**John Karger** [02:00:46] So, you know, there are species like caracaras. Caracaras come to us during the quail season. Quail hunters, have their dogs, working their dogs. All of a sudden, this caracara, which is part falcon, part hawk, part vulture. What a strange thing.

**John Karger** [02:01:03] You've got to think of a great miracle when that was designed. It can survive by eating dead animals. It has the capability, it has the weapons to kill live prey and socialize with other long-wing, fast-flying birds, capture live prey. But he also can hang out with the vultures and survive. And he does a good job there.

**John Karger** [02:01:21] But they run on the ground a lot and they eat a lot of wood rats. During the quail season, we get these hunters. God, they'll come in and they're huffing and puffing and they're like, "I chased that bird for two and a half hours, me and my bird dog. And finally my bird dog caught him and he got grabbed in the face and I had to go to the vet with that. And now I got this bird and the vet told me that you're the guy to go to. And that's how we got that bird."

**John Karger** [02:01:46] That's a bird that comes in. It's just as fat as it can be. That's the wrong word. It's just as heavy as it can be. I don't want him fat, trying to get myself unfat. But they're healthy. They've been chasing rats around wood piles. They're fast on their legs, and at nighttime, they jump up into a branch. And next day they're like, "I've got to go to work", jump down on the ground, go down to a wood pile and kill a rat. They survive. Snakes, insects.

**John Karger** [02:02:15] I'm going to turn that bird loose. I've turned them loose on ranches that I know the people have and appreciate them. I've heard people say, and "I see that bird down in that valley every day, and he looks just like when you turned him loose. He's surviving."

**John Karger** [02:02:29] And I'm not going to destine that bird to life in a zoo or in our educational programs if I know he can survive.

**John Karger** [02:02:37] So, the birds we have for educational birds are not releasable at this time. I have an agreement with the state and federal government that if they become releasable during the period that I'm using them as educational birds, maybe they may be. I thought they were imprinted to people. But the more I fly them, the more I exercise them, and the more I expose them to catching a lure, catching game. And they start flying out of the theater, away from me. And they're being obstinate. They're out of here.

**John Karger** [02:03:04] I put them back into a flight recovery cage, socialize with other birds, let them capture more live prey in there, and you can walk in there and they'll fly away from you and they're gone. We release them.

**David Todd** [02:03:17] And for those birds that are not yet ready to be released, how do you typically care for these birds that they come in with a broken limb? Or, you know, I think you mentioned that some of them come in and they've ingested something, you give them charcoal to try and purge that. Can you talk about some of the ways that you care for these animals?

**John Karger** [02:03:40] Well, and as I told you, yes. Yes. Thank you. As we're adapting today where our whole program has changed because of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, HPAI. Avian influenza has been around a long time. But we're seeing it raise its ugly head, and we've never seen it in the wild populations as we're seeing it now.

**John Karger** [02:04:15] I just read in the Atlantic about islands that had shorebirds on them, that their population has dropped down to 10%.

**John Karger** [02:04:29] I'm associated with the Peregrine Fund and thus I'm a supporter of work being done with the condor in the United States - the California condor. Their population was decimated 20%. The population that we've been working so hard to get bred in captivity and released back in the wild, introduced pairs together, and had wild nesting pairs. They had 20% of the population.

**John Karger** [02:04:58] So today, here's how it starts. A person calls us or we go out and get them. But if a person shows up at our door, the bird is taken from them. But it is not taken into our facility. It is taken to a quarantine facility on the grounds. At that time, a lot of data is taken from it - same as if you go into an emergency room. It's looked at. Its data is measured - temperature. What is it doing? What kind of condition is it in? What does it need for immediate care?

**John Karger** [02:05:30] This is where I think we excel, because I've always been connected to veterinarians. The veterinarians trust me. I have my education. I don't always have a veterinarian there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But I have a telephone. So I can call them. I have, every one of my employees or volunteers are taught to be veterinary technicians. They know to say to me, the bird's weight is, the bird's condition is, the bird's attitude is, its behavior is, this is what I observe - a fractured leg.

**John Karger** [02:06:09] I can't tell you what, how it happened, but his right leg is fractured. My next question is, "Is that fracture open or closed?" Open means you've got bones sticking out. Closed means the bones are inside the body. That changes the direction you're going to go. So if it is closed, which we always like to have, then you're going to immediately start looking at A) giving the bird some fluids. Because the first thing that happens when they're down and they're not eating is they get dehydrated. And that's probably one of the best ways to save them.

**John Karger** [02:06:40] Then the next thing is we're going to find out what the temperature is. Automatically, we're going to pull some tests where there are some blood tests, and we'll do some some intestinal tests. We'll find out if they've got some parasites, because through all of this, we have one question to answer. All the rest of it is trying, it's pretty obvious you know, it's got a broken wing, it's down and it can't fly away.

**John Karger** [02:07:06] Here's my question: "Why did this bird get in this position?" And guess what we've found? We have found other diseases. We have found other factors, like poisons. We've found other factors, like heavy metals.

[02:07:26] Last Chance Forever was the first group to yell and tell San Antonio, "You have got West Nile virus here." "Oh, no, we don't." "Yes, you do."

**John Karger** [02:07:36] And sure enough, you know what? It was a time like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is raising its head. It's ugly. It's really beating on everything. West Nile virus killed lots of birds. It affects the birds in a terrible way - in the nervous system.

**John Karger** [02:07:52] So, HPAI was discovered by falconers. They were out flying birds and their bird killed a duck. And the duck didn't fly away well. They noticed that was an easy kill. And the bird eats on the duck and it kills them in three days.

**John Karger** [02:08:09] And there are some they are now finding that have survived and have developed what we call a "titer". I mean, you've got a certain amount of that disease in the

blood level and the body's able to develop the ability to fight it off, so they have a titer. We're learning more and more about it, but we're also really paying attention to HPAI because it's going to sneak up on us like COVID. You know, it's something we don't know much about.

**John Karger** [02:08:35] What does that stand for? What is the abbreviation? I'm sorry.

**John Karger** [02:08:38] Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. There are multiple strands of this. This is a H5N1, a H5N1. I believe. I have just not referred to it that much. I call it HPAI. But there are lots of these kinds of things around animals, wildlife, life in general fight them off. But I can't tell you whether it's due to our latest environmental situation.

**John Karger** [02:09:05] But, on a common-sense level, I think Mother Nature is not happy with us and throwing lots of lots of things at us. And the HPAI has changed our entire tactics to get a bird in.

**John Karger** [02:09:23] So, now, that bird goes through quarantine. I have a contact who was one of my volunteers, one of my employees. She now is in the lab at Colorado State University. They have started working with us and we send them a batch of blood and tests.

**John Karger** [02:09:41] So if we have, say, for example, last spring we had five screech owls come in, we would test all those and put them into a batch. If it came back negative, we could take that batch of birds and put them into our main hospital area and start caring for them there.

**John Karger** [02:09:55] If we had one of them come back positive, then they all had to be individually tested. It costs \$35 per bird, per test, which doesn't sound like much. But when you're doing 330 birds a year, it's a lot.

**John Karger** [02:10:09] Then we have a quarantine facility. My employee, who is a volunteer, young man by the name of Ian Joplin, is what I call one of my "inheritors". He's stayed around with me. And he puts himself in a hazmat suit, comes back to that person bringing that bird in, and he graciously takes it from them with a hazmat suit on.

**John Karger** [02:10:35] Gets the bird situated in the quarantine area. Pulls some tests from it. Notifies myself, notifies the manager of the facility, notifies my veterinarian, and then we get that test sent off to my person at Colorado State University.

**John Karger** [02:10:53] We started that because, as humans do, when it really started raising its ugly head, controlling agencies suddenly put out, suddenly put out an edict that said, "You're a state employee and you find a raptor..." (because it was affecting at the time raptors more than anything, but now we're finding out the real sources is migratory birds - waterfowl is a big one.) "You find a wild bird. You put it down, you contact us, and we'll decide whether it goes to Texas A&M University or some lab."

**John Karger** [02:11:34] We test them. And I found that out. My veterinarian found it out. We threw the anchor out and said, "Hold on a second. You can't do that."

**John Karger** [02:11:44] And I had to tell them, "You want me to tell Veterans of Foreign Wars who spilled blood that you're going to kill every bald eagle that comes in just because it's, you know, you don't know how to determine whether it has a broken leg, and that's why it's down."

**John Karger** [02:12:02] Because the symptoms are pretty clear. You have some blindness. You've got some change of eye color. You have neurological symptoms. And they die quickly. They'll flop around on the ground, and they don't know where they're at. And those are pretty classic symptoms. And when we have a bird like that, we're very suspicious. And many times we put those birds down.

**John Karger** [02:12:27] But, if we could get that bird into our quarantine facility and get one of my educated staffers to look at it, or myself, we can look at and say, this bird doesn't have any neurological problems. It doesn't it doesn't have the typical problem, the problems that that disease causes. It has a broken wing.

**John Karger** [02:12:49] So, we quarantine it a little bit, do a test on it. Comes up negative, we support it. And then we get it into surgery and we move on with the rest of how our work goes.

**John Karger** [02:12:58] Our rehabilitation consists of triage, immediate care, designed surgical or medical care, where they might need medications. They might need lead getting taken out of their system. They might need fractures repaired. They might have eaten something that didn't agree with them. We just got to get them over that. They might have had heat stroke. They might have been too cold. And they could be a juvenile that was found out of the nest.

**John Karger** [02:13:31] When we start asking the questions, we look further. We pull blood from them. We look at the blood. We pull manure from them, and we look for parasites. A lot of times birds get hit crossing roads, not because you put a road in. That road's been there for 20 years. Why did an adult bird suddenly get whacked by a car? Because they were doing desperate things. They had a parasite in them that was eating them up, and they are thin when they come into us, not just ...

**John Karger** [02:14:00] We can look at the fracture, for example, and that fracture does not reflect a three-week starvation period. So why were they starving? Why were they desperate to get hit by a car? This is what sets us apart in the world of wildlife rehabilitation.

**John Karger** [02:14:17] So, in asking that question, we find out that they've got a broken leg, but they also have this parasite. It's a blood parasite and it's just eating them up. Treat the blood parasite, treat the damage that's been caused by being hit by a car in desperation.

**John Karger** [02:14:33] Put them back into a situation where they have to socialize with other birds, have to capture their own prey, after we make them stronger.

**John Karger** [02:14:40] We also use falconry to get them physically fit again. That's the other component. They're not just thrown into a cage. You can have the biggest flight cage in the world, stretching a half a mile. And birds are just like humans. You know, "My wings hurts. I don't want to fly across there." And they'll just sit there and debilitate themselves.

**John Karger** [02:15:03] So, you've got to go in and push them. You might even have to put that bird on an old falconry term called a creance, C-R-E-A-N-C-E, and it's a long line. And you put him on that long line. And it is a talent that a person who has learned from someone else who knows how to toss that bird in the air, and let that bird fly, best that it can, and get stronger over a period of time, knowing how long you have to do that, how often you have to do it, to the point where the bird...

**John Karger** [02:15:31] Put the bird on the ground. He picks up the weight of that line and starts flying like he's going to fly to the trees. And you know that you've gotten that bird back to that flying skill. You've got it back to the hunting skills behaviorally because it's housed in a flight recovery chamber, a flight cage. I don't like to call them cages. And he's socializing a little bird; he's capturing his own food. But you've also made him stronger.

**John Karger** [02:16:01] And in the most difficult cases, we will enter them into the art of falconry, where we will do just enough manning where they're not tamed to us, they're tolerant. And now we've got them on a creance line and we can put bait in front of them and they have got to go get it.

**John Karger** [02:16:24] We force them into that situation. It's not like we beat them into it. But we put them in that situation where they've got to fly and make themselves strong. And you can't, I dare say, I would not feel comfortable putting a bird into an enclosed flight recovery cage, and seeing it flying around and then just release it. I don't think you're doing that bird real justice.

**David Todd** [02:16:49] Well, tell us about the last step. Say, a bird has recovered and you've determined that it's time for it to go back to the wild. How do you select a release site? And how do you do the release?

**John Karger** [02:17:09] Well, there's a lot of species - take, for example, caracaras, they traditionally were found from the southern part of Texas, that little belt, all the way over to Florida. But their masses were depleted by DDT, and they were kind of chased down into Mexico with that. And they survived well in Mexico. And now they're making a great recovery.

**John Karger** [02:17:33] A caracara could pretty much go anywhere. These days, we're starting to see them as far north as Dallas, and west to the northwest above Dallas. In that desert country, they can pretty much go anywhere south of San Antonio. I like to take them to places that either I know the landowner. Or I know where they are. Today our resources are so wonderful.

**John Karger** [02:17:54] You know, you can, there's a program called Onx and you can look on Onx and they'll tell you who owns what, what tract of land, where it's at, where you are at. And it takes a GPS reading and says, you are here and here are the landowners around you. You know, you don't get a direct phone number, but you've got ways you can figure out who owns what.

**John Karger** [02:18:13] We try to release them in a place where they are found. You don't release an American kestrel, which is a small falcon... You get that bird, let's say we get that bird in the spring, we would not release that bird in the summertime in South Texas because they're not traditionally found here. So we would have to go to Dallas, that area, and we'd find a good river bottom. We might find a state park. We would not trespass on that state park, but, you know, right there from the road, in a safe place. You release that bird.

**John Karger** [02:18:52] Now, things have changed with this HPAI and other diseases that's happening with other wild animals, deer especially. Every bird we have to document by GPS where we released it. In other words, we used to, on our record, used to say, "We're at the corner of such and such highway. And such and such highway was one mile away."

**John Karger** [02:19:12] That's what the banding people like you to do. If you band a bird out of a nest, they want you to get the closest intersection. I'm sure they've changed too today - that they want GPS readings.

**John Karger** [02:19:22] So, now we have to put down a GPS reading and closest town, that kind of thing. But we pick places where that bird is found from.

**John Karger** [02:19:28] Some birds are migratory. And if it's during the migratory season, just getting it to a place where they can have a few days of settling down, knowing that they're out of a cage, knowing they're out of a chamber, knowing that they've got the capability. Get their wits about them and they have the ability to catch food there fairly easily - like Calaveras Lake, south of San Antonio is good. We find these kinds of places and that's what we release them.

**John Karger** [02:19:53] But we do not release them until they have captured three times, three different types of species, associated with other birds, and they've recovered from their injury, and they are to the best of our ability to have them parasite-free.

**John Karger** [02:20:16] So I remember hearing that you saw that some of the urgency to your raptor work is in what you've seen in the change in habitat and the pace of urbanization and I guess the increasing difficulty finding places where these birds can be released. And so I was hoping you could maybe fill us in on that, that sort of larger context to what is going on in the world that these birds occupy.

**John Karger** [02:20:52] We've seen a lot of changes, for good and not so good. A lot of it is, boy, we're headed for a hard lesson of understanding one resource that is going to control everything. It's called water.

**John Karger** [02:21:17] And we've seen birds that have come out of an area where they've been displaced because they've gone in and put in a dam, public, put in a big lake and that area is no longer a breeding population.

**John Karger** [02:21:31] We've seen birds, the Harris's hawk, where I used to, I had an elderly man who was a rancher and he let us on in his place. He didn't really understand what we're doing and he just thought it was odd enough that he allowed it. But we had a 20,000-acre pasture where we had 100 nests. Dr. Cragg brought me into that. We had 100 nests and we watched those nests be multi-used by birds, starting out in the spring with great horns, early, early spring, February, by great horned owls and late summer by Harris's hawks and they might use the same nest.

**John Karger** [02:22:09] That's a large, flat, open cattle-raising pasture now. All the mesquite trees are gone. All the oak trees except around the creek bottoms are gone. That was put there so that cattle could be raised, land could be paid for.

**John Karger** [02:22:28] And if I might, if you might give me one moment and try to educate the average person who might be listening to this, who lives in an apartment, who lives in the city, doesn't really know where their food comes from. It is sheer hell for a person to try to keep open land.

**John Karger** [02:22:51] I can't tell you how many times that I have been looked at and just directly told that that's worthless land because you could have put a mall on it. You could have

put apartments. And they'll fight you, saying, "No, for the greater good, we've got to have homes for people." Every animal bends down to humans, except for human animals.

**John Karger** [02:23:14] And so we've seen a huge change in the dynamics of the birds. We've seen more birds hit by cars.

**John Karger** [02:23:20] We see more birds that we try to educate people just because it's spring, don't spray your trees. Well, it's spring, and you've got to spray all the trees for insects. Well, have you looked on the bottom side of the leaves? You see leaves that are cut? Because when you spray those trees, we see more screech owls, we see more great horned owls, because you hire somebody to come in there. It may not be something, a chemical, that's going to stay, but it's still affecting. You get sprayed with it. You have to inhale it. You have to get it in your eyes. And these birds are affected.

**John Karger** [02:23:58] We've seen birds that are brought in because they build more highways. We can't seem in Texas, for example, to get the idea that, you know, it's a lot of space between places, but we better get trains back into our lives, and we've got to get ways for people to travel someplace and not keep winding the highways.

**John Karger** [02:24:23] That's not the solution.

**John Karger** [02:24:27] I saw a thing where the highway department one time I had this incredible thought: "You know what? We're not going to pay for the side roads anymore. So you guys who want to develop on the side of the highway that we're building for the greater good. You're going to pay for every foot of that side road."

**John Karger** [02:24:49] Well, today they even, some of them, build a parkway and they don't let development, they don't put a lot of exits on them, and kind of slow down that development just because you put a trail through there and all of a sudden humans start making other trails.

**John Karger** [02:25:03] But my gosh, they, it really created a lot of conundrum. I mean, and a lot of trouble. And that got dropped off pretty quick. So when you decide that you want to put in a business next to, well, you are helped by an access road. You're helped by an exit ramp. You're helped by signage.

**John Karger** [02:25:29] So, what I'm trying to get at here is people don't understand that if you own open land and you want to keep that open land. I have taken my phone away. But people can look on the Internet and look at what a five foot across tree gives us with taking out taking in CO2 and giving us oxygen. It's tons, tons.

**John Karger** [02:25:56] So, it doesn't make sense to widen roads. It makes more sense to look at trying to recondition people to understand: you got a place to go, let's do it en masse, and not be so individualized where you got one person driving one car. That also displaces everything.

**John Karger** [02:26:14] And people don't really realize ... I have, Last Chance Forever owns the last of my family's legacy. And the land I'm sitting on, and my house, most likely will go into that entire legacy because this was a link to the Karger house and land and it's been since joined the other larger piece of property.

**John Karger** [02:26:40] And it's because I was living up here that my cousin realized that, here's one of my family members that believes like I do. And she tried to give it away to other people and it didn't work. And I didn't take it. She went to tears when I didn't. I didn't, I said I couldn't inherit it because of the taxes. So we figured out another way to do it.

**John Karger** [02:27:01] And I didn't immediately tell her about Last Chance Forever. She didn't understand why I save birds. She went and researched it in her eighties. And so she kept that land open. But I'll tell you right now, I've got huge subdivisions to the north of me. I got people on the Internet. I watch Facebook every day. I'm not a big Facebook person, but I'm monitoring, who are scrambling for places to stay in Comfort, Texas because they love the air and the Hill Country and we're tearing our land up around us. It's disappearing so fast. Just look at the highway between you and me, between Austin and Dripping Springs. Oh, my goodness.

**John Karger** [02:27:49] And that's what happens with these birds. We see an exponential event beginning where you have birds that lose good food supply. So diseases start to pick up. Good water supply - diseases pick up. Displacement of their ability to live there. Loss of food supply - but the food supply is also linked to how the land functions. Loss of trees, loss of the ability to filter the air. So it just runs down the hill hitting every species.

**John Karger** [02:28:23] And the birds we receive, we see more that people find because they bought a new house. I don't begrudge anybody for wanting one. And then they complain because they have this wonderful park area across the fence. Oh, my God, They're going to build houses over there. Well, that's kind of what you came here for, so don't be complaining about that.

**John Karger** [02:28:43] But now those animals are going to get displaced. And then there's some, there is some, some villainizing. You know, there was a big thing here. I think Austin embraces it still: greenbelts. They kind of required builders to save X amount of land. And it became fashionable. People like it. And they showed that they liked it. Builders, you know, let's embrace this. So they save green belt areas.

**John Karger** [02:29:13] I have people come to me and say, you know, all those animals that live in the green belt, they're wild animals. They're dangerous and they just sit out there and, you know, go after my poodle when it goes out for a walk out past the yard.

**John Karger** [02:29:24] Oh, okay. Let me sit down and talk with you a little bit and hope you don't hate me afterwards. But that's what's changed our dynamics is the human population has become the "above all". And we have got to figure out how to change our dynamics and adapt with or it's just not...

**John Karger** [02:29:50] Nature is going to kick our backside against you. You go ahead and step in front of that train and see if it stops. Nature is a train and it is not going to stop.

**David Todd** [02:30:00] Well, yes, I think one of the things that it's intriguing to me, and you know much more about this, is that that these birds of prey that you work with are so sensitive, I mean, as apex predators. They seem like quite the indicator of, you know, the hurtling train that you mentioned. Can you talk about why the raptors that you work with are particularly good as an indicator? I think that's where you are going with this.

**John Karger** [02:30:36] They breathe the same air. They drink the same water. They eat from the same earth. Their bodies are smaller. What affects them will affect us and it will affect them faster.

**John Karger** [02:30:50] And if you read any of the sages that have written books. It always indicates that, as you look at nature from the microbes in the ground, which I have friends that are entomologists, they get giddy about finding another species of microbe. And it thrills me too, but that's not my specialty. But that world there is as complex as looking up at the sky and seeing an eagle sitting in a tree. But they are indicator species.

**John Karger** [02:31:23] If you can't save them for anything else, you had your ... we've been educating people lately, you know, they'll say, "My dog disappeared. I know it was an owl. It just took my dog, carried it away."

**John Karger** [02:31:33] No, they cannot carry anything heavier than one third of their body weight. And most people don't realize that they are hollow-boned. They breathe air through their bones. They're designed light for flight, and they can pick up one third of their body weight. There's only one bird of prey that can pick up heavier than its body weight. And that's the American kestrel, sparrowhawk, sparrow falcon, and Falco sparverius. I love Latin names.

**John Karger** [02:32:03] But we try to educate people, in fact, that, no, that your dog didn't, or your cat didn't disappear because of an owl. If it would have been an owl, for example, you would have found what's called a pluck ring. And it comes from falconry. We observe birds plucking things. So an owl, if it killed a cat, and I'm not saying they won't, because they will. But aren't we the ones that are supposed to be the shepherds of the earth? And did not we put that cat or that dog into that situation? And weren't we supposed to be responsible enough? And where did we jump off the train saying we owned from hell to heaven and inside of our fence boundary? Nothing can come in here and nothing can grow up in here.

**John Karger** [02:32:53] And yet you maybe don't have a fence. Well, I've noticed on Facebook recently in my area, I can't tell you how many dogs are lost. People have moved in here in the last three years. And they just open the door, let the dog out, and he's on somebody's ranch chasing cattle, chasing sheep. And I get a call because of my friends and I have to deal with it.

**John Karger** [02:33:19] Well, but that right there, people don't really realize that nature goes on and that owl - it might take your cat, but most of the time it's smart enough to know cats are really not on my diet. Rats, lizards, snakes, raccoons, and possums. I don't know exactly what that animal is.

**John Karger** [02:33:45] Occasionally, during the breeding season, when they're desperate to feed their youngsters, and there's not much food around because neighborhoods have grown up, fields disappear. Yep, they may take advantage of it. And they may miss it many, many times before they ever catch it.

**John Karger** [02:34:01] But they'll kill that animal and you're going to find what's called a pluck ring. They'll kill that animal, and they will pluck the hair off of it because they eat a little of that. They do use some of it in their digestive system.

**John Karger** [02:34:16] So, they pluck the hair off it, but they look up. Every time they pluck something or they eat something, they look up, they go back down, they look up, and as a

result, they move around. So you see a circle of feathers or a circle of fur. And that pluck ring will tell you that a raptor or another type of predator has been there.

**John Karger** [02:34:36] So, usually, I sometimes just entertain myself or go out and go to where that is claimed to happen. And what I find is feral dogs, feral cats. I find something has been introduced. I mean, we all, everybody like, "Oh, check it out. Look at those raccoons. Let's put out some food for them." Well, now the raccoons carried off the cat. You know, you can't blame the raccoon. He's just going for the easy life.

**John Karger** [02:35:10] So, you know, I have gone out and found, backing up to my own home. Well, sometimes I have birds that have an injury... So, I say, "Go find out where that happened." It has to be a nail sticking out or they've caught their foot in a opening or a wall. And I actually say, I have to go and look for this. You're not going to like the end result. Go look and investigate. And this has become a game to be a detective.

**John Karger** [02:35:40] So, with people, I try to tell them, if you've lost a cat, for example, and just disappeared, you might ought to look around at the bigger picture in the world. As a friend of mine once said, "Look beyond your target."

**John Karger** [02:35:55] So, we're impacted today by bigger population of humans, loss of territory, loss of quality of food supply. And we still have pressure on these birds. We, I, I was sad to see a huge group of vultures be destroyed by a school between Comfort and Austin because the parents were afraid that they were going to spread diseases, and it smelled.

**John Karger** [02:36:27] But the greater good, that's what happened. They lost. They couldn't hire a lawyer.

**David Todd** [02:36:35] So, could you talk a little bit about that, sort of difference between people's attitudes, and I think you called them "humane ideals". And what I think you're trying to work on is this, I think that you call it a real truth of a restorative conservation. Can you help us understand the difference between those two, between the ideals, you know, of humane treatment, and then this, I guess, maybe the harder reality of restorative conservation?

**John Karger** [02:37:11] You know, humans are known for, we're like a pendulum. And when we react, we swing sometimes way over. And it takes a while for us to come back to the middle, where our common ground is. And for years and years, you know, no one cared about shooting all the buffalo out. They didn't care. And all of a sudden, they're "Oops, we made a mistake here." No one cared or thought that they could ever kill off the passenger pigeon. No one cared that they thought they could kill out the trumpeter swan because people wanted the feathers for their hats.

**John Karger** [02:37:58] So ideals swing and a movement came in, in that period of environmentalism, which, you know, an environmentalist today can sometimes be screamed at, yelled at, be called a horrible person, which I invite everyone to be an environmentalist. What else would you want to think about, but that which gives you your food and the very air that you breathe and the water you drink? You should be an environmentalist.

**John Karger** [02:38:28] But there are goofy people that have swung so far in quotes "environmentalism" that they have created a hellish situation for any recovery. And in the animal world, we have people who have ... the United States is really famous for this, Britain is

pretty, pretty heavy into it. We have enough money. We have a lot of time. And when you have a lot of time and you're fortunate enough to think about things, suddenly people get on to the tear of animal rights and animal humaneness. And all of a sudden you've got somebody who doesn't understand.

**John Karger** [02:39:18] I just saw something come across my desk. It was a picture of a carrot with a little carrot knob with a carrot top, stuck on the edge of that bigger carrot. And it said, "Oh my God, look out. Here comes the vegetarian to slaughter the carrots."

**John Karger** [02:39:36] Everybody has... I think it's great that we have the right to think the way we want to think. And given that I'll agree to disagree, but we've gotten away from knowing where our food comes from and how brutal sometimes nature is, and how difficult it is to produce the food that we like to eat. And then, all of a sudden, somebody has figured out that, "I can make a lot of money off this with this idea."

**John Karger** [02:40:04] Or, just convince a lot of people that we're doing the right thing, in hopes of being humane, which we should all be humane. We should all treat ourselves and our animals and the earth and plants everything properly, with respect. But we've swung so far with some of these animal organizations that they've lost their common sense.

**John Karger** [02:40:28] And thus, for example, how many children on the south side of San Antonio are going to be able to see a killer whale? How many? And today they have forced through protesting the people and pushing the idea of inhumaneness. SeaWorld no longer will have killer whales in their exhibits, and maybe SeaWorld's guilty to some extent for not having the right facilities. Maybe they are guilty of over-promoting them and making money with them.

**John Karger** [02:41:03] You know, destroy that and take it completely out of the system, and then stand back and say, "Yep, the world is so much better." And you got children growing up who've never seen an alive eye in an animal, the spirit of that animal, the true soul of that animal that religious people are going to say, animals don't have souls and you're wasting your time to save them. You should be working with humans because they have souls.

**John Karger** [02:41:34] But, we're going to have children that never see those animals, that never go down to see what's in the Gulf Coast, and they're certainly not going to be able to get out into the ocean.

**John Karger** [02:41:43] So, how are you going to ask those kids to save clean air? How are you going to ask those children to save any animal on the earth? How are you going to even ask them, and I think it needs to be asked, how are you going to ask them to have compassion?

**John Karger** [02:41:57] And it may very well link - don't quote me as saying that it is, but it may very well link to some of our horrible deaths that are happening because we don't have a connection to what life and death is all about.

**John Karger** [02:42:13] And you take a farmer's kid, they know exactly what life or death is all about - a real farmer or a real rancher. They know what it's all about. Doesn't mean they're all going to be good kids because they're bad people everywhere and can't fix them all.

**John Karger** [02:42:26] But, the idea that you eliminate animals out of people's lives. And these humane groups, they drive me absolutely crazy. And they're affecting me today. They

just won a lawsuit. I don't know how long ago. There was a law passed, it's called APHIS. Don't know exactly what that acronym means. But it is linked to the United States Department of Agriculture, and protection of animals and their health and security.

**John Karger** [02:43:09] And the animal rights people have generated enough passion and have gotten people who are not connected to the land and don't hunt, don't know what, what that's all about. Don't know how to gather their own food. They've turn them into villains and they're like, "Those are the bad guys. We're the good guys. Give us the money. And we'll legislate it."

**John Karger** [02:43:36] And today they sued, in the last year or so, they sued the Agriculture Department because they have not been regulating birds and wild animals. And won. They found a judge who was sympathetic.

**John Karger** [02:43:55] And. a whole different subject about, you know, we've got to be very careful how we acquire our judges, and where they're coming from, and what their ideals are, and make sure they're not biased. This judge ruled against them. And the judge did the right thing. This law had not been utilized. It was passed. And these people found a niche. They got this law passed. They got this judge to decree: you will, by this period, make this law work because the law is there.

**John Karger** [02:44:31] So now, these people who don't like what, for example, I do or some... You know, I've never been protested. I've never, I've had people come up, and had very deep discussions with them. And I've had some who've come up said, "Well, I still disagree with you." And I will smile at them and nod. I don't look down upon them. I don't treat them bad. I appreciate their passion. And they walk away from me. But at least they're going to remember me.

**John Karger** [02:45:01] But they, today, they are going to affect me. We here. What is the likely effect of APHIS changing how they practice? In the beginning, heading it well, because they're forced to, they're going to have to show some sort of image to the law, to the judge, to the people watching. They're doing it. And he or she, I don't know who, they passed it. They won the lawsuit because they said that they were not using this law. They found this little niche. So now they're going to be forced. And I think it's going to become a real stew pot of problems because they don't have the money.

**John Karger** [02:45:44] Agriculture Department doesn't have the money to have the agents to go around and inspect everybody. Now, there are already, for example, our laws are change and they should. We're headed towards, out here on the ranch, we have cattle that we raise. All those animals are going to have to be tagged. We're going to have to have, probably go eventually go to a geotag. And they will show that if a disease breaks out, they'll know where it came from. What a great idea. I mean, if we could track down to where the hoof and mouth came from, what part of the country in Texas it came from, we'd know to go there and we'd know how to quarantine that area off?

**John Karger** [02:46:23] I see nothing wrong with that.

**John Karger** [02:46:26] But with this situation, when I leave out of here, go to Minnesota, and that law is in effect. Every bird that I take with me will have to have a health certificate, which we do already because we are regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and by the state of Texas, Parks and Wildlife Department. Every animal that crosses state lines, we have a

grace period. We can only be in that state for X amount of time. But really they're turning their eyes away from us to let us travel from here to Minnesota.

**John Karger** [02:46:58] We would have to have a health permit for every state we go through. We would have to stop every two hours and let every animal out of their cage or transport box. Give them exercise, enhancement. Because it's kind of inhumane that you're using these animals.

**John Karger** [02:47:21] And what's happened is that some of us are our own worst enemies. There's not as many of them like us who are coming from a conservation angle with a true conservation organization that is a noose around their neck financially. Some, because the laws have changed through pressure, you can now have a permit and you can do educational programs with wild animals possessing them, and that's your only obligation.

**John Karger** [02:47:50] So, I've lost some contracts going to some of these festivals or outdoor hunting events, you know, or wherever somebody wants us. Maybe they're having a town event and where they would make a nice donation to us. We've lost it to somebody whose only obligation is five birds, five raptors. The trailer that they transport them in, or maybe the cages they transport them in. That's all they have an obligation to.

**John Karger** [02:48:18] And under the guise of conservation education, that's what they're doing. And they'll stand out there and they'll at first try to put a stoppage on it. State of Texas did by saying you got to have a 501(c)(3). Well, they could do that. So now they'll stand out there and say, "We've got a 501(c)(3) for the conservation. But people are so busy, they're not going to go out and say, "Can you please give me a 990 report? I want to see how much of the money's going to here and to there." So we don't know how much money that they're collecting in the donation box or things that are selling and saying. These birds are wonderful. Aren't they beautiful?

**John Karger** [02:48:54] And at the same time, on one level, for me, any education is valuable education. So I can't really throw big stones.

**John Karger** [02:49:01] But that's the reality of it.

**John Karger** [02:49:03] So, APHIS is now going to enforce animal humane laws, because the humane organizations who some...

**John Karger** [02:49:19] There was a person that I argued with, I debated with, I spoke nicely to. And her last words to me was David Bamberger in Blanco County has restored a huge piece of property, put it back to this beautiful, lush Hill Country place where there were no springs flowing, by doing great conservation work there, educating incredible amounts of people.

**John Karger** [02:49:43] And part of the reason he could is he also had a love for Pere David deer. He has more Pere David deer on his property than there are in the wild. He cannot send many of those back into the wild because of the paperwork trying to get where they come from to accept them.

**John Karger** [02:50:06] But a part of that is, is there are people who want to eat that animal, who want to shoot that animal, and they will pay very large dollars to be able to have that opportunity.

**John Karger** [02:50:18] Now, some people can do it in a very, but I consider, I think, shooting fish in a barrel. And that's where people get angry and they get to be rabid animal rights people. Or you have a place where you're not guided except how to get out to the place and you got to sit for hours. And this is where this animal is going to come through here. And you got to have some skills. But still, they might pay a tremendous amount of money. And he plowed that back into this place.

**John Karger** [02:50:49] So this lady ... Whoops. Let me back up, this person said to me, "I would rather see them disappear from the Earth, than to be in his facilities."

**John Karger** [02:51:03] What? What is that? What? How selfish is that? How self-centered. I just feel horrible. I'm anti-hunting, and I think that's cruel and inhumane. And, yeah, but you still want to eat and you still want to breathe and you still want open land and you still want springs.

**John Karger** [02:51:24] And how is this guy going to get three or 4000, I think it may be up to 5000 acres, open? Are you going to, are you going to go out and send money to him every month? Not many people do.

**John Karger** [02:51:39] But you want to eat. You want to breathe. By God, you've got these ideas: it's inhumane and cruel. And you got people who jumped onto that. And they're making lots of money and hand-over-fist money. You look at the humane societies, and don't get me wrong, there's really good work they do on humaneness to dogs and cats and wildlife and everything. There is a need for them.

**John Karger** [02:52:06] But when you lose your sight of passion, and let it be compassion and lack of common sense. And you figure it out that people's hearts will pay huge. You jump onto that and you capitalize on it and you become powerful with strange ideas. They don't want me to ... For me, they've never, like I said, I've never been protested. I've done huge events like this state fair. I've done 20,000. I'll do an audience of 2500 people four times a day in audiences. I've never been protested. I've had some deep discussions. And I think that's because we promote common sense.

**John Karger** [02:52:59] You know, come on, think about this.

**John Karger** [02:53:01] And we do care about the animals.

**John Karger** [02:53:03] But when you let that caring about the animals fall on the side of someone who is a good friend of mine who works closely with us is anti-rodeo. But I've sat him down, I've taken him to the rodeos and I've said, "Look at that bull. He works about 15 minutes a year. Otherwise, he's going to be at the slaughter and he's going to be killed and eaten. He doesn't have to work too hard and look at the condition of him."

**John Karger** [02:53:27] And he goes, "Well. They wrap and strap around his testicles."

**John Karger** [02:53:32] All right, let's go back and look. Yes, they wrap a strap on them, but that strap is behind there or in front of there. And it's a tightness around the waist. And if you watch it closely, when they open the chute, there's somebody holding that strap. It pulls tight. But it's not latched. So that animal is like, "Hey, what have I got around my waist? I'm going to protest this." And he bucks around for a little while, throws this guy to the ground, gores him, beats him to the ground. Everybody applauds.

**John Karger** [02:54:01] And then "ENNN".

**John Karger** [02:54:02] And you watch those bulls and they run, WHOOSH, right to the gate because back there's cookies. Back there "He's like. Hey, boys. How's it going? You see how I threw that guy off?" "Oh, that was incredible. That cowboy, he's gonna be limping for about a month, you know."

**John Karger** [02:54:17] Who was it inhumane to? They don't do that because they set up their mindset to get a focused point that's right in front of them. And they got blinders on. And they lose where they came from.

**John Karger** [02:54:31] Where did we all come from? We got big hands on the end of our arms. Those were weapons. Sharp teeth to tear meat, flat teeth to grind seeds and bones. We were built to capture our food.

**John Karger** [02:54:46] And we chose not to do that because it's easy to let somebody else do it. And some of us don't like it. I don't hunt near as much as I used to. It really isn't because I don't like hunting anymore. It's because I'm just lazy. I let somebody else do it and I share it with them and I just don't have to do it anymore. I got too smart to that, how hard it is.

**John Karger** [02:55:09] But I have got a little video clip that I love, where I'm on a horse and I'm talking to everyone and I say to them, "I'm now going to take you on a falconry hunt. First thing I would do is I'll teach you how to handle the birds. Second thing I'd do is I would put on a special glove on your hand, called a gauntlet, that's different than the one we worked with when we were working with birds then. Now we're going to go to the field."

**John Karger** [02:55:36] "I've got a bird on your hand. We will be walking in the field. I would turn my dog loose, a dog would run about it. He would scent out a rabbit. I would sneak up behind you and say, 'Stand still. Loosen the hood'," which a hood on a bird covers their eyes so that they don't bob their eyes around. And the other animals, who have great eyesight, don't see that movement. And they stay still.

**John Karger** [02:56:02] "Remove your hood." Keeps the bird calm, it doesn't jostle around when you're getting into the field. "Remove your hood. Now, look at the dog. When I say, 'take', that dog's going to push that rabbit."

**John Karger** [02:56:15] Suddenly, the dog pushes the rabbit and the bird bolts off your hand. I've taught you a word that a falconer uses, encourages the bird says, "I'm right here with you. I'm your partner."

**John Karger** [02:56:28] It flies down. It catches that rabbit. It buries its talons. There's blood. There's pain, suffering. Death.

**John Karger** [02:56:37] It's not the prettiest picture in our eyes, but you got to give nature credit for how efficient it is.

**John Karger** [02:56:43] And you as a partner might have to participate because he's now getting kicked by the back end of the rabbit. So he caught a jackrabbit, a large hare. They can literally gut a bird of prey.

**John Karger** [02:56:54] So now you've got to get there. And maybe you're holding the rabbit until he squeezes through it with these powerful talons. Now he's killed that rabbit.

**John Karger** [02:57:03] And I'm going to teach you that you might have tears, but you don't celebrate the death of that animal. You say, "thank you" to that rabbit for giving its life.

**John Karger** [02:57:12] I say this to people thousands of times a year. And I said at that moment we let that bird eat what he wants and we put him on a perch, clean up the rabbit, and we put it over a fire or we gather it up to take it home. After we're done, we're going to have some of that.

**John Karger** [02:57:31] And even the hard core, hard core. I just, I just can't look. Oh, my God, there's blood. The poor animal's suffering. Even those people, I believe, in my beliefs that they look at me and they're like, you know, you've got to give this guy credit because he's just spread out in front of us the reality of it all, and he has not celebrated it in a way that has made us insulted.

**John Karger** [02:58:04] So, I think the animal rights people have a place. I think when you've got a place that is taking advantage of animals and you can walk there and see it, the animals don't look good. Their message is not good. I think we ought to have a country that goes to them and says, "All right, here you go. We're going to either give you a ticket or we're going to give you one more chance to get straightened out, and come back and inspect you, because we know that your mission statement is good, but you're not following it. Now, if they don't follow, you shut them down.

**John Karger** [02:58:43] But I don't think it's fair, like we tend to do in this country, we pull the trigger on the shotgun and we hit everybody. So what this new law is going to do, it's going to force the ideals of the people who believe that a bird of prey who had no opportunity whatsoever because they've got a criminal wing or they've got a behavioral problem, who is now being transported just about as fast as you can get it to some place because you don't want it to be rolling around in that trailer, or that transport vehicle, or that cage, or whatever you got it in, is now going to be in front of everyone.

**John Karger** [02:59:22] And instead of being put down with a needle or, as they like to say, put their head into a vat of nitrogen. That's humane, isn't it? You take them and turn them upside down and put their head in a vat of nitrogen that kills them instantly.

**John Karger** [02:59:40] But what if I can stand up and say, "You know what? I got a job. Check it out, man. I'm a red tailed hawk. This is what I do. Listen to this guy talking about me. Look at me. Am I not beautiful and incredible? And I'm alive. Look at my eye. Look for my soul."

**John Karger** [02:59:58] So, how do you teach a child not to shoot another child in a school? Teach them what life is all about, and how something dies, and watch it die in front of you. And you see what how that child changes. So I think it does relate back some of the violence we're seeing.

**David Todd** [03:00:15] I like your message of respect for our fellow creatures. And I, it seems like a thread that goes through a lot of your work at Last Chance Forever. I'm wondering, you know, as you look back over your career with Last Chance Forever, the Bird of Prey Conservancy, how would you want folks to consider its work? Maybe we can end there and, you know, just give a sort of an overview of your life's work there.

**John Karger** [03:00:53] Well, going back to one of the things we talked about first. I have been, I'm up here at the ranch a lot, Last Chance Forever's land holding. I'm fighting off the taxing agencies. I'm fighting off the people who believe, well, they've got lots of land, we'll just poach. I'm fighting off the people who leave trash. You know, they move into the area. They can't afford more than an apartment, and they can't afford trash service.

**John Karger** [03:01:20] So, I'm up here at the ranch. I made a decision with my staff that I'm available. I'm on the phone with them, on the computer with them. I go in there, Dr. Hill and I have a surgical unit up here. The surgeries are done up here. She retired recently and sold her clinic. But we've made a surgical clinic up here. She can still do our surgeries.

**John Karger** [03:01:43] We, I still do the initial behavioral work. Maybe I might do the initial physical therapy until they're done healing from the surgery, and then get it back to the center. So I'm still connected.

**John Karger** [03:01:54] But I made a, and I believe an insightful decision, to let this group of people who have been so good to me all these years, the employees that are there, to start taking some of the responsibility. And Monday, we have an inspection, that's going to be inspected by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. And I will, at that time, not only give them a tour of the facility and what we're doing, but I will introduce once again, I will introduce the people that are there and say you need to be looking right now, as these are going to be the next permit holders.

**John Karger** [03:02:29] And at my age, it is time for me to be able to look, I look at you, for example, I think you're a young man, but you know that you get to a certain point, you realize I'm on the downside. They're on the upside. And so you got to start passing your legacy down.

**John Karger** [03:02:48] And do I want it to die with it with me or do I want it to continue on? I want Last Chance Forever to keep going the way that we have been going. We not go hard line like many humanists and animal rights people do, we go with a common-sense, flexible line, trying to adapt to how, and that doesn't mean we're the middle of road and complacent. It means that we're trying to figure out, you know, is this right or wrong and how will we work with this?

**John Karger** [03:03:20] I want Last Chance Forever to continue on, long after me, because this place where I'm at, this ranch, this allows us to have a place to release birds, to stage birds, to release them from here. And we do that. I've got a set of ravens outside that will be released here, and they can be put in a place where we know their resources. I have released other birds here.

**John Karger** [03:03:47] It also opens up the door of education. We can do educational programs on the ranch. We can we can do hikes. And we built a small little amphitheater there. We've got a mobile observatory where people can look at the sky, the night sky. So we're trying to teach dark sky thoughts. And so I'm planning on Last Chance Forever going on much longer than I.

**John Karger** [03:04:13] And hopefully it will continue with a common-sense conservation thread. Use a little common sense with what you're doing and you can pretty much, you're not going to make all the people happy all the time. You're not going to make most of them happy all the time, but you're going to get them to respect you because you gave them respect.

**David Todd** [03:04:37] I think that is a good note to end on.

**David Todd** [03:04:40] I wanted to thank you for all your time explaining what you're doing and giving a sort of inside view of things at Last Chance Forever. So thank you so much.

**David Todd** [03:04:55] I hope our paths cross, but until then, I hope you take care of yourself and the caracaras and the ravens and the eagles and the hawks that are at your facility.

**John Karger** [03:05:07] Well, I appreciate that very much. And as you can tell, I'm very proud of it and I'm proud of it from the aspect that it's an angle that to me just looks so simple. But it's so difficult in our world today where we're modernizing so quickly, and our earth is in trouble, and people are so far away from where, and it's going to be hard to get back to any of that. I don't expect a lot of people to go out and go hunting, but it would be great if they understood, if they just thought for a moment and said, "Why do you?"

**John Karger** [03:05:49] And, you know, have a mindset that says, "Let's learn to agree to disagree", and realize that the common denominator idea is that we've got to get along, all of us.

**David Todd** [03:06:05] True. Absolutely. You're correct there.

**John Karger** [03:06:08] We haven't found a place to escape to, have we?

**David Todd** [03:06:11] No, not yet. No.

**David Todd** [03:06:13] Well, thank you again. This has been terrific. I've learned so much. Thanks for being a good teacher. And I hope you have a good day.

**John Karger** [03:06:23] You bet. And I thank you very much for the opportunity.

**John Karger** [03:06:26] And may I ask you, when you said this was available to us, what will happen to this recording? I know that there's been some interruptions and things, but will I have a availability of a copy of the recording where I can listen to it again, or at least pass it on, let people listen to it or write from it or something like that?

**David Todd** [03:06:43] Absolutely. We'll have transcripts and the audio. And that's very important to us to make sure that you have access to that. I'll be sending that within the week.

**John Karger** [03:06:53] Well, I do believe that, you know, I'm older, so I'm slow, I'm slow to embrace. Boy, it's important technology, this latest technology is incredible for educational purposes, on all sides, good and bad.

**John Karger** [03:07:07] But I think I said when my veterinarian decided to tell our board at our board meeting last week of your project, and that you had asked me to participate, I had no idea how....

**John Karger** [03:07:48] Excuse me.

**John Karger** [03:07:49] A person has. And that's, when I began this conversation with you. I wanted you to hear from me, that I wanted you to hear that I knew your value, your worth.

And that I appreciated it. So. It's always good to know that you have value, and you have worth. Somebody, you know, sees your value.

**David Todd** [03:08:31] Yeah. Absolutely.

**John Karger** [03:08:32] I don't generally get, I generally don't get this emotional. But when you get this age, you start seeing the other side. So you want the Last Chance Forever to survive, just like I want your project to survive. If I can make a donation, I will do that. I just think StoryCorps, your organization, the Bullock Library.

**John Karger** [03:09:01] I think when you came to me. And I didn't take it to the board. My president of my board did. It just was, the reaction was fantastic because they believe in me. So thanks.

**David Todd** [03:09:24] Well, I'm so glad that you participated. It wouldn't work without, you know, your involvement and so thank you for telling your story. And I hope that this helps, you know, get the word out. That's really the whole point, and make sure that those stories are preserved, and shared down the road. So thank you again.

**David Todd** [03:09:44] And I've got a button on my end. I will stop the recording and just wish you all the best.

**David Todd** [03:09:52] Have a good weekend. And I hope we see one another sometime soon.

**John Karger** [03:09:56] Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate it. It's an honor.

**John Karger** [03:10:00] And if I can be of any help at any time, you know, I will tell you that Bob Phillips did a great job, you know, promoting his television show. And it's something you should consider. People need to know more about what you're doing. And I think there are some of us that if you were to ever branch just a little, I know you're busier than hell, but if you were to ever branch and you were to ask some of us to say, "Hey, join me, we're going to try to garner some support, maybe it's a political support, maybe it's financial or whatever, a granting organization." I think that you'll find some of us would be more than happy to participate with you. I raised my hand first. Phillips, you know, has that Phillips festival every year and has all these people. He does all these stories about these interesting people and people flock to those things. I don't go to much anymore, but I believe in what you're doing. So if I can help, please call upon me.

**David Todd** [03:10:58] Thank you. That's very sweet of you. Very generous. I appreciate it. All right. Take care.

**John Karger** [03:11:06] Have a great weekend.

**David Todd** [03:11:07] You, too. Bye now.