

#### **Episode 4 Transcript from Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule**

**Peter Brown (host):** Hi, I'm Peter Brown and this is *Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule*. We have arrived at the star — not the winner of Calgary's Citizen of the Century contest, but the person who got the most nominations, and by far the most entertaining.

Most of them focused on one specific individual: Mr. Tom Baines.

This is Episode 4: I mean, come on. The Citizen of the Century is clearly Tom Baines.

If you went to elementary school in Calgary in the 1960s or 1970s, there's a pretty good chance you remember Tom Baines.

**Student:** He shows us animal skins and he explains how other people live.

**Student:** He was the first curator of the Calgary Zoo from 1929 to 1964, but it was after his retirement that he began his remarkable outreach campaign.

**Student:** I really like the shark's jaw, and the most interesting thing was the shield made out of the goat's skin.

**Brown:** These nomination letters were written by schoolchildren in 1975. They're read for us by Miss Hayward's class at Hugh A. Bennett School in Calgary.

Tom Baines would show up at school gyms and cover tables, 50 feet of tables, with furs, bear claws, ostrich eggs, rhino horns...

**Peter Karsten:** ...skeletons and shell of a tortoise and shark teeth and snakeskin. I'm Peter Karsten, the retired director of the Calgary Zoo. I worked there from '62 to '94. Tom would borrow animals from the zoo, I remember one of them was a complete set of jaws of a white shark that was big enough you could put over your face, and he quite often did that, actually, had little kids look through this, this great big set of jawbones.

**Student:** Mr. Baines let us walk through the shark's jaw.

**Brown:** It's estimated that over the years, Tom Baines visited a million schoolchildren.

**Student:** In our school alone, he has come four times in this year.

**Student:** Once he brought a snake, he let us feel it.

**Student:** And he even put the snake around us.

**Gregory Burbidge:** If somebody came into a classroom when I was five or six with a snake and let me try on animal furs, that would be the greatest person I had ever met in my life.

**Brown:** This is Gregory Burbidge...

**Burbidge:** ...the interim public art director. As a little kid, yeah, that would absolutely be the greatest Calgarian you had ever met.

**Brown:** Do you remember the question Devin McLaughlin asked when the time capsule was first opened?

**Speaker:** Oh, there's a cassette tape, wonder what's on the cassette tape?

**Brown:** Here it is:

**Student:** *To the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Tom Baines is a real nice guy. This year he came to our school three times, and the school year isn't half-way over. For our science fair, he has brought his pet snake, Agnes, and a lot of valuable furs. On Saint Patrick's Day, Mr. Baines showed us slides on Ireland. We, the students of Southwood School, sincerely believe that Mr. Tom Baines should win the award of the Citizen of the Year. Yours truly, Cameron Spillman, Blair Falconson and Darcy Hamstra.*

**Student:** *Mr. Baines has a large collection of animal skins and interesting things. I particularly like his pet snake, Agnes. I think you have made a wise decision if you choose Mr. Baines for Citizen of the Year. By Ken Swatzky and Ray Stone.*

**Brown:** When the time capsule was opened, those of us who saw the contents were struck almost immediately by two things. One, there were a lot of entries for Tom Baines, and two, some of those entries were identical. Let me be clear, there were some classes in which the teachers seemed to make suggestions, and then the students put those ideas into their own words. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about groups of entries that are identical, word for word.

**Student:** *He shows us all kinds of different things. He lets us touch and try on many furs. He is very good to us.*

**Brown:** Early on in the process that caused some of the more suspicious among us to be suspicious.

**Speaker:** Well, it seems like the teacher maybe wrote something up on the board and they copied it. Maybe they weren't actually given a voice to express who they thought their own Citizen of the Century would be.

**Speaker:** I'm not sure why there are essentially almost a thousand nomination forms for him. Now, he was around at the time. Was he involved with students at the time? I'm not quite sure. Possibly. Did he ask people to nominate himself during his school visits? Maybe that's something that you can take a look into.

**Speaker:** I think there was a little bit of coercion involved in this.

**Brown:** We'll get back to that accusation later. Let me say now, I don't like it. Right now, let's focus on Tom Baines, and why he was a hero to so many schoolchildren.

**Student:** I just remember the moment that he would walk through the doors. He was like a pro athlete or a movie star walking through the doors with all of his stuff, and the place would go wild, the place would literally go crazy.

This is audio of Tom Baines visiting the classroom at Saint Michael's School in 1968:

**Teacher:** *I'd like to introduce you this morning to Mr. Baines from the Glenbow Foundation. He's got many artifacts which he's going to show you, Mr. Baines?*

**Baines:** *Thanks Mrs. Westinson. Mrs. Westinson, ladies and gentlemen, and young ladies and gentlemen, I hope it will interest you to quite an extent, the collection is going to be here a few days, and you can model around, be able to get in touch with these different things, and I hope you'll be interested and be able to read up and ask more questions. You start with the beaver, and I think we're all familiar with it, you know, it was trapped out, it used to be very common in Europe, but it was trapped out, for hundreds of years they were the stuff that you...*

**Student:** After the assembly is over, he takes us one class at a time and shows us the things. And because he is so nice, he will let you pick up most of the objects, except the objects that break easily.

**Baines:** *...the trouble to analyze this stuff, which has a foul smell. You can all smell it later on.*

**Brown:** Not only did Tom Baines bring amazing artifacts and also slides documenting his adventures around the world, he himself cut a memorable figure.

**Trish Exton-Parder:** Oh, when I remember Tom it's so clear.

These comments are from three people with long connections to the Calgary Zoo, Trish Exton-Parder, Bob Peel and Peter Karsten.

**Exton-Parder:** He had whitish hair that was kind of parted to the side, he had a very strong character face, like you could do an amazing caricature of it because it was a very distinctive face."

**Bob Peel:** He was always well dressed, even when he was going to be handling animals, and it was typical of Tom that he would have a sports coat with a tie on as well, even when I saw him on the grounds, it was often that way. I don't I don't remember seeing him in casual clothes.

**Baines:** *...And also badgers, you know, badger, it gets fat and goes down in the ground. On a nice day in the winter he'll come up and catch mice. They work with a type...*

**Peter Karsten:** Tom was a very stately man, he always walked upright, he was always friendly and, you know, I sometimes called him the modern Santa Claus, because he must have been something like that to the children, except he was real.

**Baines:** *This is a little American dipper egg, the only bird in the world that walks underwater, not swim, but I saw some in Okotoks the other day, they'll dive down and then they walk about, and it's amazing...*

**Brown:** Blair White was in Grade 4 when Tom Baines visited his class 50 years ago.

**Blair White:** He looked older than he acted. So he had white hair, this well-groomed white mustache, he wore a suit, I just remember him looking like somebody's grandpa, but so friendly, so approachable, and the world's greatest storyteller. You just didn't want to even breathe, to miss something that he said. He had so many adventures and it was just like you were reading a book or watching a movie, listening to him talk.

**Baines:** *They were actually on top of a whale when that picture was taken, and the whale, you can just see the dock, more or less the shadow of the way his its tail and obviously the position the whale is, the tail is it shows a head was that way up here about 50 or 60, 70 feet, so they were actually on top of the whale when they took the picture.*

**Brown:** And one other thing.

**Student:** He was also a bowl full of jokes.

**Brown:** He was a bowl full of jokes. Letter after letter talks about Tom Baines' sense of humour.

**Baines:** *The principal at one of the Calgary schools was telling me the other day that nobody's eaten by sharks anymore in Australia, and I asked him why, and he said, oh, it's very simple, they get a sign and a piece of tin, and they paint on a sign and hang it around your neck before you go in the water in Australia, and you never get eaten. I don't think anybody can imagine what's on the sign, but it's sure easy. It says on the sign 'Edmonton is a far better city than Calgary,' and of course, even a shark wouldn't swallow a story like that, so you're absolutely safe.*

**Karsten:** He did have a very good sense of humour. I never saw him being angry. He always was friendly, always composed. Just a grand man to work with. Yeah.

**Student:** I've never seen him without a smile.

**Student:** He is one beautiful person, and I sincerely hope he gets picked.

**Speaker:** Whatever he would pull from children's comments, he would find a little bit of fun with that. So he'd also query children and ask them about something, and, What do you think this is? And then perhaps would find a little bit of humour in that. No, actually, that's not a bone

from a rhinoceros, that's what this is, and then have a little bit of fun with it, or talk about zoo poo, or whatever it could be.

**Baines:** *This is something all you boys have got a couple of near the top of your body, I wonder if any of you can guess what it is. I'm told you don't always use them. Oh, golly, no, brains! Mr. Mclsaac's told me and Mrs. Westinson this morning that you were a brainy bunch, you always use your brains, you never miss a grade, no, no, something you don't usually do when you're told to keep quiet. There he is. This is an eardrum of a whale. Very small, but it's got no reason much to need an eardrum, but that is the drum of the whale.*

**Speaker:** And things that children maybe not in a normal day, would learn or in their science programs, but something a little bit fun. And he knew how to tickle the funny bone with kids, and it was addicting.

**Baines:** *Now, quick, Grade 8, how many butterflies? Quick please. Grade 9. I need seven. Let's run through them quickly. One right? Two, three, four, five, six, seven. Well, what are all these if they're not butterflies? Leaves. Kids, did you ever see a leaf with a hand and legs?*

**Student:** He is a fun-making man.

**Brown:** The children didn't just write letters. Many of them also sent drawings of Mr. Baines and his collection.

**Speaker:** The illustrations, I really think, bring to light how much they idolized him, and he was kind of like a character, like Indiana Jones or something. So here there's a kid in this illustration that's going to be rescued from sharks that are after him, there's another one here of Mr. Baines with all of his different, you know, skins and shark teeth and animals all out on the table, and he's kind of showing them off to the class. So I really enjoyed seeing that sort of youthful idolization and sort of zest for life.

**Brown:** To see those drawings for yourself, go to our episode description and follow the link. And my favorite nominations tell their own story about the child doing the nominating.

**Student:** He isn't selfish like other people.

**Student:** He showed us all of the different things he got from different countries when he could have just kept for himself and not let anyone see them.

**Brown:** Kids also like Tom Baines because...

**Student:** He usually has some skins, but he never shoots any animals. He just gets them from animals who've been in an accident.

**Student:** He does not go around asking people to kill the animals for him.

**Brown:** And this from Mark.

**Mark (student):** One of the reasons I liked Mr. Baines to come was because we got to miss our writing lesson.

**Brown:** Fair enough Mark. Fair enough. Out of the hundreds of Tom Baines nominations, this one from Wynn Bogle or Sogle, maybe, see what you think, was my favourite by far.

**Wynn:** At the age of over 80, he is still going from school to school. Here, there, far, near. He would have to have a strong will to do that. Don't you think so? Well, I do, and that may endanger his health. But just like the mailman, rain, snow, sleet, builds a rack. I have to show these kids my artifact.

**Brown:** Wynn, if you're out there, I would love to know how you turned out. And the letters nominating Tom Baines also offer us one more thing: a mystery. Many of them mentioned something like this.

**Student:** He gives us a small keepsake, like a real eye, which he told us to put under our pillow, and in the morning, we might get a wish.

**Brown:** Whale eye? Or in some accounts, snake eye? What was that? We will solve the mystery of the whale eye/snake eye in our next episode. We'll also hear from a former Calgary student whose encounter with Tom Baines was a pivot point in his life.

That's coming up in Episode 5: *If Tom Baines isn't Citizen of the Century, I Don't Even Know What We're Doing Here.*

This has been Episode 4 of *Greetings from 1975: The Calgary time Capsule*. Thanks to Blair White, to our letter readers in Miss Hayward's class at Hugh A. Bennett School, and to everyone at the Wilder Institute, Calgary Zoo, in particular Trish Exton-Parder, Peter Karsten and Bob Peel. Audio of Tom Baines doing his gimmick bag presentation at St. Michael's School is courtesy of Digital Collections, University of Calgary.

Thanks to Anita Dammer and Nathan Chandler at AV Conservation. Special thanks to the Calgary Telus Convention Centre for being secret stewards of the time capsule. You can see all the time capsule letters we talk about, plus children's art and more, just go to the link in our episode description.

*Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule* is produced by me, Peter Brown for Calgary Arts Development in the City of Calgary.