



Tommy Lee Jones

GETTING IT DONE RIGHT

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by William C. Reynolds
photography Matt Lankes

There is a morning sound in the West, one that is familiar and comforting, especially to those in the horse and cattle business. It comes early, before the crispness of dawn. It's a sound made by boots and hooves readying for a day's work. There's a shuffling and stomping of cowboys and horses that is accompanied by the sweet ring of spur rowels or the gentle sway of rein chains as bits are warmed in cowboy's hands before the bridle is gently slipped on. There's a certain sound to a foot stepping into a stirrup and a rider settling into a saddle. Sounds broken by quiet voices with only a few words of morning greeting and some brief instructions about the day ahead. Sound gives way to brightness. Riders trot out. Daylight's burning.

This is a rancher's world, and it's the world in which Tommy Lee Jones feels most comfortable - more at home in the saddle than in the spotlight. And while this blockbuster megastar is loyal to his acting craft, he would still rather be riding. He'll leave here to make a film or do business, but he always circles back. "When I'm here, I spend as much time as I can on horseback," he says. "It's how I was raised."

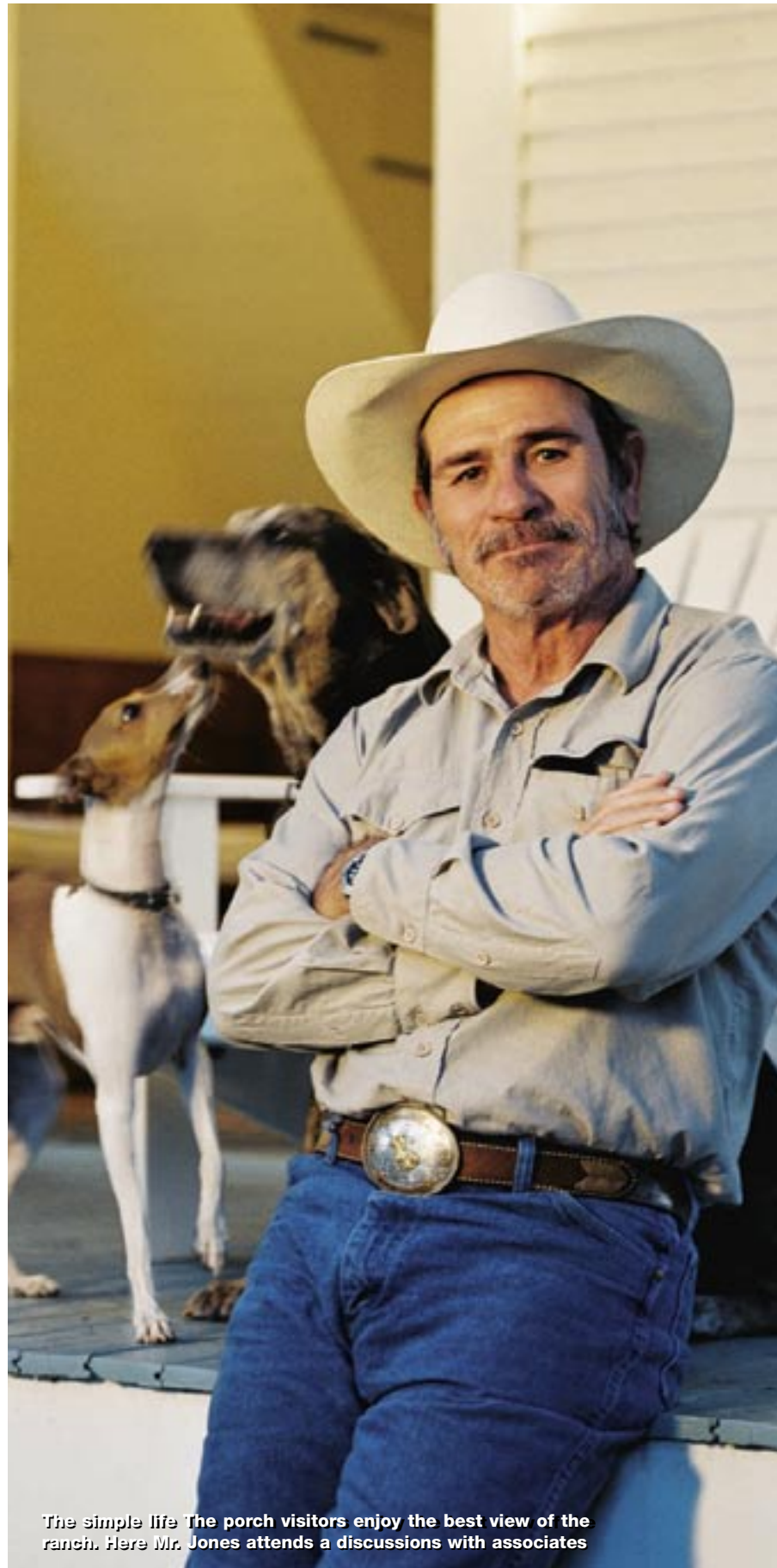
Cattle ranching, horses, movie making - and polo -- they all have a place in the life of Tommy Lee Jones. He has a horse operation at his San Saba ranch near San Antonio and Brangus cattle at his other ranch in West Texas, the WD. It is still wide open country - something that hasn't changed

Dawn and Tommy Lee Jones at their San Saba, Texas Ranch along with their new paint mare, "Pretty Bird Woman."

“At some point in my working life it became fairly clear I could live where I wanted to, so I decided to live at home in Texas”

since the days when bands of Apaches roamed freely there. It's a land tough on horses and cattle, and Jones respects those qualities in land as well as stock. "We're pretty tough when it comes to culling stock," he says through that signature squint. "It can be a hard place."

Born in San Saba, a Texas Hill Country town about two and a half hours from San Antonio, Tommy Lee Jones is an eighth-generation Texan. "At some point in my working life it became fairly clear I could live where I wanted to, so I decided to live at home in Texas," Jones says. "After some successful endeavors in my acting career, I had enough money to invest in some real estate, and I decided to invest in something I could enjoy. I looked at a lot of ranches all over the Hill Country and possibly a little bit west of here. I looked at pretty much every ranch on the market," he says from the main house. "This house is incredible - now. It was livable when I bought the ranch, but it was ugly. It was built in 1856, and past generations of owners had plastered over the stonework with some kind of stucco-like material, and the original two-story wooden porch had long since come apart. So in the interest of putting up something that would last, the previous owners put in a new porch that was made up of cinder blocks, and then they added a roof over it. You could live here, but it wasn't a beautiful structure, it was in a beautiful place. So several years ago we started working on it to restore it to its original condition. The surprise came when we started uncovering something more beautiful about it every day, something worth preserving, until this jewel of a place emerged."



The simple life The porch visitors enjoy the best view of the ranch. Here Mr. Jones attends a discussions with associates

And a jewel it is. This comfortable, no-nonsense rancher's house is pretty much what one would expect from Tommy Lee Jones, who takes a no-nonsense approach to both his life and his art. With his straight-shooter appeal, it's no wonder Jones' fans feel so strongly about his portrayals in Westerns. His newest project, an indie film that starts shooting this fall, has Jones both acting and directing. *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* tells the story of a Texas ranch foreman whose effort to keep a promise to one of his illegal migrant workers reveals terrible crimes. "I was drawn to [the film] because it's about the Rio Grande Valley," Jones says. "It's a study in social contrasts between West Texas and Northern Mexico. It's about honor, friendship, and priorities." But is it a Western? "Well, it does have horses and lots of cowboys." He smiles.

"The screenplay is by a writer who is one of my hunting buddies, a Mexican screenwriter named Guillermo Arriaga. Two of the movies he wrote, *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams*, are very interesting. Guillermo's a very bright guy and we enjoy his family. Another one of my hunting friends, Michael Fitzgerald, is producing the film. He did the last four or five of John Huston's films and has produced other films I like. He has been a pal for a long time and has worked very hard to help put the Harvard Film Archive together. Harvard now has one of the largest collections of motion picture prints in the world available to students and film historians, somewhere between 2,500 and 3,000 prints. As a result, there's now a film department at Harvard. The Department of Film Studies is beginning to grow in one of the most conservative academic environments in the world. It's a newfangled thing there, motion pictures, but there are encouraging signs."

Jones knows whereof he speaks: The English major graduated cum laude from Harvard. That rarefied East was a completely different world from the West Jones lives and has portrayed so convincingly on film. Horses, cowboys, and the West are important aspects in many of Tommy Lee



The San Saba polo team: 1-Tommy Lee Jones, 2-Hector Galindo, 3-Agustin Merlos, 4-Gerardo Collardin.

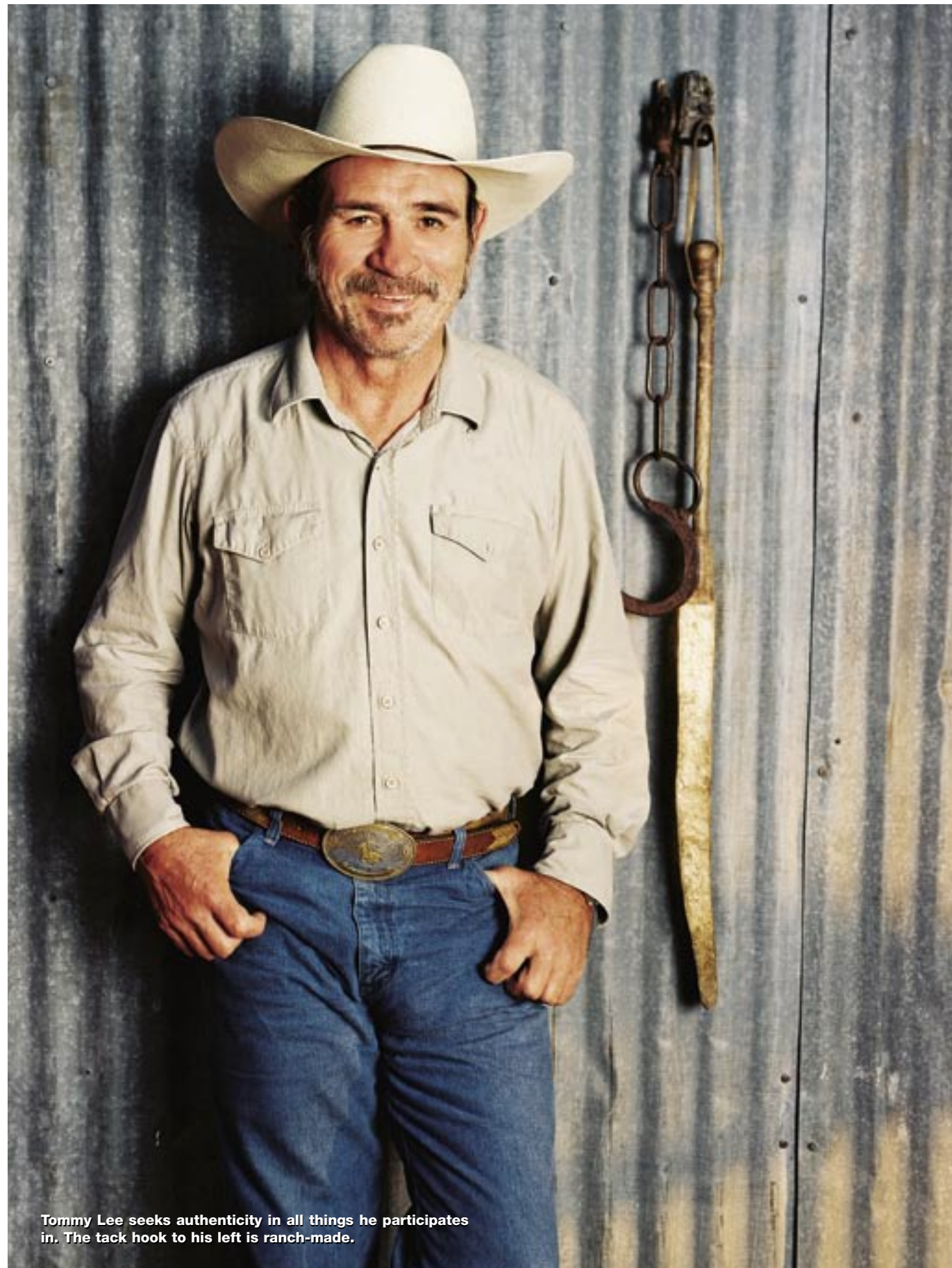
Jones' projects, including his new picture and the Emmy-winning *Lonesome Dove*. He says he wanted the part in *Lonesome Dove* more than almost any part he had tried to get. "I worked very hard to get it because I love the book and I love the subject matter. It is very close to my family's experience and our past. The language is very familiar - not only poetic, but familiar. So are the characters' relations with

each other. Larry [McMurtry's] book is a patchwork of Texas history and folklore. I don't think there is a kid in West Texas, or anywhere else, who's never been scared by the story of the nest of young water moccasins that, when bothered, will kill you swimming in a river."

One of the most memorable scenes in *Lonesome Dove* is the river crossing in which the herd apparently disturbs a



Stick n'Ball. Tommy Lee Jones practicing at his San Saba Ranch.



Tommy Lee seeks authenticity in all things he participates in. The tack hook to his left is ranch-made.

“nest” of snakes that horribly kill one of the drovers. “Maybe someone has found such a nest; I certainly haven’t, but everyone is frightened by it,” Jones says. “Of the cattle scenes, most people know the story of Charles Goodnight and the Reynolds brothers; one of them, W.D. Reynolds, bringing Oliver Loving - another cattle business pioneer, and namesake of the Loving Trail -- back to Texas after he had been killed by Indian arrows. Lonesome Dove was such a beautiful story, such a beautiful work of fiction with every component of it based on fact. And all of it very specific to my home, so it was very gratifying taking part in it.”

Jones pauses for a moment, leaning forward in his pickup, looking off across his ranch, seeing those cattle, those riders again. He picks right up, taking the topic back to his own life as a rancher and his own ranches. “This place is very gratifying.” He scans the horizon. “Our long-term plan was to have the major horse operation on this place. As far as the grazing here, it’s very useful - to both ranches. We can wean our heifer crop in West Texas [at the other ranch, the WD]. Then, we put them in trailers and bring them here. With the abundance of grass and water we have here they’ll grow very quickly. They don’t have to hustle for feed. This allows for a couple of things. They can be put in much smaller pastures here, and they can see trucks and cowboys on horseback every day. We don’t breed them until they are two years olds, yet after a year here and experiencing everything that goes on, they are pretty well gentled out and easy to manage.”

Jones leans back in the truck seat, shaking his head slowly. “If we left them for that same 18 months in West Texas they might see a man twice in that time,” he says. “They’d be as wild as deer and very hard to manage. But when we breed them, they’re moved back to the WD, and by then, it’s time for a new bunch of heifers to come here. So one ranch can do things the other cannot. In West Texas we can have the large volume, and here we can micromanage the development of our female bovines.”

THE MISSING PHOTOGRAPHY: MPTV

COWBOYS
INDIANS

“I worked very hard to get it because I love the book and I love the subject matter. It is very close to my family’s experience and our past.”

— Regarding his role in Lonesome Dove

Lonesome Dove was an instant classic Western when it first aired 15 years ago. More recently, Tommy Lee Jones starred in a decidedly different “Western” - The Missing. “I loved the script,” he says. “I loved the story, and I certainly liked the area where Ron Howard wanted to shoot around Santa Fe. We had a beautiful time living in Santa Fe. I like working with horses, and I was able to talk Ron Howard into using the Chiricahua dialect of the Apache family of languages in the movie; I was glad he went for that. He was very responsive to ideas about costumes, about how to shoot horses. And studying with Elbys Hugar, a Chiricahua elder, to familiarize myself with that language and then use it in my work was an incredible experience - it was an experience full of wonder and joy.”

Jones has reason to celebrate Native

dialects as he is part Cherokee. “Those were very happy days. I was very happy with the structure of the script that we built with Ron. But unfortunately the one we wrote and the one we shot were not exactly what you see in the final movie. It was clear from the movie we shot that my character, Jones, had left his family to study art. It was a calling for him, to study at the Art Students League in New York to learn how to be an oil painter, and he had left his family after moving to St. Louis to head farther west. He wanted to paint the animals and plants and people of the West, in a way that many painters did at the time. I guess the most common painter who did that during the 19th century would be Paul Gauguin, who left France and his family to paint in Tahiti. My character Jones left the East Coast and went into the mountains in a similar way - a lot of painters were doing that back

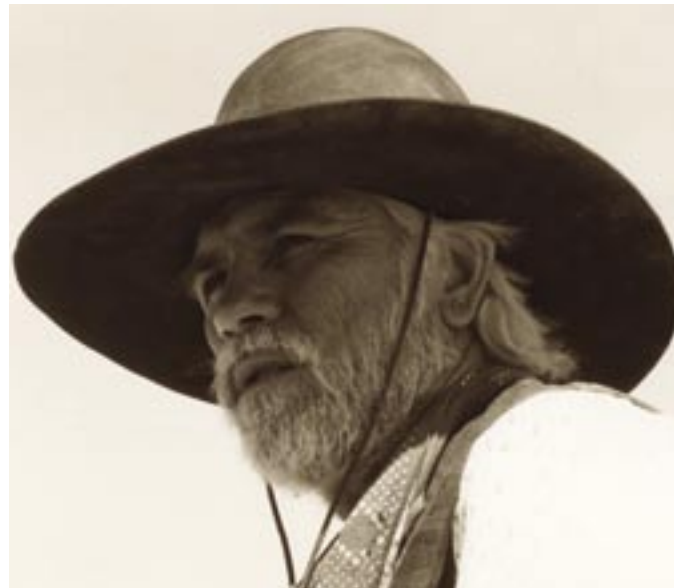


The Missing, directed by Ron Howard, featured Tommy Lee Jones’ character — originally as a frustrated artist, a point of the story that was omitted. Here he is seen with his co-star Cate Blanchett.

then. Ultimately, I believe - I don't actually know what happened - somebody in the marketing department at Revolution Studios said, 'You know, What is this art stuff?' And they just chopped it right out of the movie. That was a disappointment. It was not really a smart decision. And I believe it's one of those instances where marketing trumps creative. With all that, it still was a good movie. Ron Howard did a beautiful job of shooting, and Cate Blanchett did a beautiful job of acting. And the little girl, Jenna Boyd, was wonderful."

But was it a Western? "Well, it had a log cabin," Jones says, nearly cracking a smile. "Listen, Westerns are really like any other type of movie. First they have to be entertaining. You look for a good script, a good director, a good acting company, a good location that's interesting and fun and carries some intrinsic manner of energy. And a good business deal. If it's a 'Western' - that's really become a pejorative term. A lot of so-called Westerns were made in the past, and they made a lot of money. Many more attempts were made to exploit that success, and a lot of bad movies were made, and the term came to imply a money-losing proposition. Time heals, sometimes, and maybe brings new ideas or sometimes good scripts. But by now, at my age, I'm looking for locations that my wife and daughter will enjoy, and with every year that goes by, having fun becomes a very important factor."

Today, fun is a driving force in Tommy Lee Jones' life. Along with his wife, Dawn, keeping up with the Joneses doesn't just involve ranch horses and cattle. For fun and togetherness, there's polo, which plays a big role in centering and filling their life



The character that defines a Texas Ranger — Capt. Woodrow F. Call, Tommy Lee's legendary portrayal in the Emmy winning mini-series Lonesome Dove.

together.

"I didn't ride or play polo before we met," Dawn says. "I was raised in town in San Antonio, so I didn't know anything about livestock or ranching or wildlife management. I knew about kayaking and cycling and hiking and running; I knew about running in cities like New York City or Los Angeles. And that journey, from San Antonio to those places, eventually brought me right



Charlie Real Bird, Tommy Lee Jones and the newest member of the Jones' family Pretty Bird Woman

back to Texas. When I met Tommy I mentioned my enthusiasm for these other sports and he wasn't really interested, but I was determined to find something that we could do together. "So she asked him if he would teach her to ride, and Jones was more than happy to introduce Dawn to polo and to horsemanship. "It wasn't an easy task because I'm very hardheaded about what I think is the right way to go about things," she says. "But everything he has taught me and told me is all falling into place now. It's a learning process. He's been riding since he was 3 years old, and his daughter Victoria has been riding since the age of 3. There are a number of things about riding a horse that come naturally to a child. It's like learning a language. When you're 30 years old, attempting to learn a new language, it's not so simple. Horsemanship is a language. When you're older, you have other things going on in your mind, preconceptions - you think there might be a better method. So over the course of the last nine years, with Tommy at the forefront and with his polo manager, Luis, and Luis' wife, Clarissa, right there with him, along with many, many others, my horsemanship has improved. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to learn from them and learn more about polo and about horses."

The Joneses have a new place in Florida near Palm Beach where they play and work their polo horses. Family plays a big part in Tommy Lee Jones' view of what polo - and life - is about. "When the International Polo Club at Palm Beach was being designed, the developers asked players what qualities they wanted to see in

the formation of the new club. Pretty smart," he says. "The first thing that Dawn and I said was that it should be kid friendly. That's the greatest value that polo has; that's the greatest thing we get out of it, and it should be the major plank in the platform upon which we stand. Start with a playground, a swimming pool, and when you start building restaurants and so forth, make sure you've got kid food. The swimming pool has to be accessible to children. You're going to have happier players, happier wives, happier kids, and the sport will be serving its highest and best purpose. Most of the other people who sponsor polo teams that play there agree. When you go to the International Polo Club, you know you're going to a place where the children will be welcome, whether they play polo or not. It's very important."

But that's Palm Beach, and this is San Saba. It's a Texas noon. The sun is high overhead and riders are returning to shade up during the heat of the day. Horses are brought in, and with them, those special sounds. Horses being unsaddled and cinches being tied up. Saddles being set on wooden rails. The talk of work completed and work to be done. The owner surveys the activity around him with something that looks like contentment. Film project, a chukka of polo, or hanging a gate on the ranch - for Tommy Lee Jones, it's not about acting the part, it's about doing, knowing the difference between close and right.



PRETTY BIRD WOMAN - COVER MODEL

When Dawn and Tommy Lee Jones spent their Fourth of July this past summer at the rodeo in Sheridan, Wyoming, they might not have expected they were going to be buying another horse. While visiting the area, Tommy and Dawn were given a rather special tour of the Little Big Horn battle site by Charlie Real Bird, a member of the Crow tribe from neighboring Garryowen, Montana, the site where the battle began.

The Jones family learned a lot on that trail ride tour with Charlie and his family. From Charlie's wife, Ramona Real Bird, they learned that her great-grandfather was a fellow named White Man Runs Him who was one of Custer's scouts. Charlie's great-grandfather, Medicine Tail, was the namesake of one of the coulees at the battleground, Medicine Tail Coulee.

The ride lasted all day, and when they returned, Charlie, who

trains horses, showed his guests a paint mare named Pretty Bird Woman [pictured on the cover with Tommy Lee Jones]. The



mare was named after Charlie's sister, who had passed a way years before. "That's a very personal thing, to name a horse after a family member," Dawn says. "The training of these horses isn't pushed. They spend a lot of time with their horses, lots of physical attention. That horse will walk right up to you."

"She'll sit in your lap," Jones says "She's a well-bred, gorgeous horse. Charlie takes great pride in his horses. This is only the second horse he has sold, because these horses are more

like members of the family. Dawn and Victoria just fell in love with her, and we're honored to get her. As anyone can tell you, it's very unusual to see an old polo player buy a paint horse, but you're looking at one who did."

LONESOME DOVE: BILL WITTLIFF, COURTESY OF WITTLIFF GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN & MEXICAN PHOTOGRAPHY, TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY — SAN MARCOS CHARLIE AND COMPANY; CREDIT TO COME

PRETTY BIRD WOMAN: CREDIT TO COME