

# THE SACRED ARCHIVES OF ADIDAM

## Digital Preservation Magazine

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### An Interview with Tim Holmes

Chief Video Engineer at the Sacred Archives of Adidam

By Claire Murdoch



*In order to keep the friends and supporters of the Sacred Archives of Adidam updated on the massive preservation project going on here right now, we thought you might enjoy reading some interviews with a few of the key players who are involved in this process on a daily basis.*

Tim Holmes is our Chief Video Engineer who oversees the recovery, preservation, and digitization of all the analog video tapes of His Divine Presence, Bhagavan Adi Da Samraj. To set up an appointment for this interview, I found Tim at work in one of the small buildings that house the equipment he uses for this project. When I walked into the darkened, cave-like room (he likes to work in the dark to get a better view of the videos) I saw that the tape he was working on was one from October 1990, which was the remarkable and unprecedented occasion where Bhagavan Adi Da Laid His Healing Hands on Ratu Seru. (Ratu Seru was a Fijian resident on Naituba at that time, who had just suffered a severely paralyzing stroke.) Tim invited me to watch, and so we sat down and received the most amazing Darshan of Bhagavan while He so lovingly Worked with and

Blessed this man and everyone present on every possible level. At the end of the occasion, we both just sat there stunned, with our hearts broken and tears in our eyes. It took everything I had to eventually break the silence to ask Tim about the interview. All I kept thinking was, so *this is the kind of extraordinary material that is being rescued from the virtual brink of extinction, to be preserved for everyone for all time. No wonder we all feel so passionate about this project!*

So it is my great pleasure to introduce you to Tim Holmes and the extremely important work that he does at the Sacred Archives of Adidam:

**Q:** When and how did you become a devotee of Adi Da Samraj?

**Tim:** Well, it was in about 1980, I was living in New York at the time, and without going through the whole story, my search had led me to many places. I had some exposure to Beloved and His Books through my brother, and finally I realized, that after searching through everything else, this was what I was looking for all along, and I became a devotee at that point.

**Q:** Did you stay in New York?

**Tim:** I was in New York until about 1984 when I came to California to work in the AV department of Adidam, where I served from 1984 to 1986. I actually did a similar thing to what

*“Bhagavan Adi Da’s Life is so important. To have the video, the moving Image representation of Him, is so important, that now we have to preserve it, and really treasure it, and make sure it is preserved for all time.”*

I'm doing now, where I transferred some of the old reel-to-reel tapes onto the kind of format we are digitizing from now - the 3/4 inch or U-matic tapes, because they were more reliable at that time. So I got an early start doing this, I guess, in 1985. I ran through a bunch of the earlier reel-to-reel tapes, starting with 1975 through 1978. It was a good introduction then. I learned a lot doing that - about Bhagavan Adi Da and about the process, too, so it kind of gave me a head start on what I'm doing now.

**Q:** That was going to be my next question: What is your technical experience and what prepared you for this service?

**Tim:** I am an electrical engineer, and I've done audio/visual work for years. So getting into this was kind of a natural thing. I did a lot of video work in the 1980's, which is good, because what I'm doing now involves working with equipment from that era, with modern technology thrown in, to make the digital conversion. It's a good combination, because it needs to get done, and I have the aptitude and skills to do it. Plus, it's just really a wonderful opportunity to be able to do it. I feel like it just changes me every day I come in here. Besides being a great education on the Sacred History of Bhagavan's Life and Work, it serves me greatly to do it.

**Q:** Where did you work with AV outside of Adidam?

**Tim:** I worked in New York City doing technical work in recording studios. Then I moved to northern California, and I worked at Lucasfilm for 15 years, working mainly with audio, but also with all sorts of different media technology there. Then I created a technology business, which allows me enough flexibility to serve here, too.

**Q:** Can you give us an overview of what you do here at the Sacred Archives?

**Tim:** Well, as you know, all the years that Bhagavan Adi Da was Teaching, there was often a video camera somewhere nearby making recordings of Him. Those tapes were made on different machines, which means different tape formats, different recording media, different everything. In the earliest days, there were black and white reel-to-reel tape decks with a black and white camera, and so those were the first recordings. Then we had color reel-to-reel tapes, and after that we went to the 3/4 inch U-matic tapes, which was the dominant professional format at the time. A lot of recordings were made on that format. Then we switched briefly to the old Betamax vid-

eo tape for a while.

**Q:** What year was that?

**Tim:** I think we switched over in 1983, when Greg Purnell recorded Bhagavan's First Arrival on Naitauba in October. That was the first Betamax. Beta was the consumer quality, and U-matic was the professional, industrial format. Beta was used as our portable format for a while. Then, in the late 1980's we switched over to mainly VHS and then SVHS. VHS was the kind of thing we all played in our homes, but SVHS was better quality. It stands for Super VHS. The predominant number of analog tapes in the Archives are SVHS. There are a couple thousand hours in that format. There are probably a total of four to five thousand hours' worth of tapes altogether, analog tapes, that we are working on. I think we are about 1/3 of the way through the core, high priority stuff that mainly is footage of Bhagavan Adi Da.

So basically what I do is I go into the Archives vault, where the tapes are organized on shelves in sequential order, and I take the oldest tapes, clean them and then transfer them, which entails playing them on old, refurbished decks. Then, the video signals from the decks are sent through specialized computers which "migrate" them into a digital format. We save them in a few different digital formats, so they are usable in different ways. These video computers are very specialized and pretty expensive, but through devotees' generous donations, they supplied us with the money to buy them.

We have a full setup, with playback decks of all the old formats that are played through these computers, which digitize them and send them to the hard drives. This system was initially conceived of by Scott Campbell with help from David Thompson. Then I came in, tweaked it some, and got it running and debugged. Elliott Mehrbach has set up a computer server with an array of many computer hard drives where the digitized videos can be stored and backed up in multiple ways. Also we copy the original tapes to new analog tape as well.

As a side note, we haven't been able to do the new analog tape copies recently, because we haven't had the money to do that right now. But the older recordings, especially the 3/4 inch tapes, we've been able to copy them to new analog tape.

For each different format, we have a cleaning machine that gently removes dust and debris without harming the

tape. We had hoped that these tape cleaners would clean the tapes well enough so that they could be played right through. Unfortunately, a number of the 3/4 inch tapes have physically deteriorated. They are made with a polyester backing that has a magnetic coating on it, and what happens is some of the magnetic coating, because of a manufacturing problem, tends to fall off with age and clogs the playback heads. These heads are spinning around on a drum extremely fast, they grab this tiny hunk of loosened magnetic oxide, and the heads clog up, so you can't see the picture. In some cases I've only been able to play a tape for less than a minute, and then had to back it up and clean off the tape heads by putting in a cleaning tape. Then I would put the original tape back in and run it for a couple more minutes, repeating this process over and over until the tape had played all the way through. As this process was repeated, a tape would play longer, with less interruptions. When it only had a few interruptions, I would do the transfer. I also discovered that if I put one of these problem tapes back on the shelf for a while, it would often play back much better later. Sometimes with no problems. The way it has worked is that most tapes have been transferred in a single pass, while some tapes have been transferred in segments. But the segments are overlapping, so no material is lost. And I think that despite the challenges, we haven't yet lost any footage yet.

**Q:** How long would it take for you to do a tape like that?

**Tim:** Well, a one-hour tape could take me four or five days in an extreme case, but that's pretty unusual. There were a number of them that had the deterioration problem that I just described, to varying degrees. We're looking into additional ways to restore those tapes, but we want to use the safest methods possible when working with them. So, when we get it all done, we will go back and see if we can improve the results.

But it does take time. The good news is that the hardest part - the 3/4 inch tapes - are done. I'm now full time on the VHS formats, which are the majority of the tapes, and that's going to speed things up.

The VHS tapes aren't without problems, though. There was a VHS video of Bhagavan visiting His Childhood grade school in 1986, that even with the professional deck we had, we just couldn't play it. At about 80 percent into the tape, the picture just messed up. We had another VHS deck, and we tried it on that deck, and sure enough,

it played it right through. So I find I have to keep a really open mind and try all sorts of things that don't seem to make any sense, but they work.

**Q:** So if for some reason, this process doesn't have enough financial funding, and it slows way down, what would be endangered by that happening?

**Tim:** The problem is that all the tapes have what you might call a freshness or expiration date on them, not literally, but a real limit nonetheless. The biggest concern was the 3/4 inch tapes, because if we didn't handle them in time, many wouldn't play back, and we would lose them. But even the VHS tapes are getting older and older. The most recent ones are already 15 to 18 years old. That's a long time for them to sit around. Some of the U-matic tapes started to show signs of trouble after 15 years.

**Q:** And what happens to the VHS tapes? Do they get moldy or does the information degrade in some way?

**Tim:** It's the same thing for all the tapes. In the beginning, the earlier tapes weren't stored in a completely climate-controlled environment. But now that the Archives is fully climate-controlled and everything is done right, the decay rate is slowed down significantly. But they are still decaying, just slower, and that's why we had set a time window for this project of around seven years when we started, which was about two or three years ago. So we're a little less than half-way through the time schedule and one-third of the way through the tapes. The good news is that we are moving into the type of tapes that we can process more quickly, because they have fewer challenges. But the danger remains: Ultimately the tapes will decay, and we won't be able to play them back.

So our big concern is that we want to get this process done as soon as possible. We need to digitize the tapes, back them up, and have them preserved for all time. And we need to do it now, because there may not be "later".

**Q:** Right, and there may not be the people to do it later.

**Tim:** Yeah, we're not getting any younger! And the equipment is not getting any younger either. So if the decks that these tapes need to be played on stop working, or can't be fixed because no one knows how, or they don't make the parts, we will lose the tapes. So, the time to do this is now, not later.

**Q:** Before we end, I have one last question: What do you love about this service and why is it important to you?

**Tim:** Well, I think I touched on it earlier. The necessity of this process happening now stands out as one of most important things to be accomplished. Bhagavan Adi Da's Life is so important. To have the video, the moving Image representation of Him, is so important, that now we have to preserve it, and make sure this Treasure is preserved for all time. That's the first thing.

And personally, I feel very fortunate that I have the abilities to make it happen. There are a lot of people who have been involved in making this come together, and I am grateful to have the ability and the time to make it work. It's a tremendous Blessing to me, because I come in and receive Bhagavan's Darshan and listen to Him Address me every day, effectively, because He's always Addressing everyone when He Talks. And to me, I watch those tapes, and every day it changes me, because Bhagavan Speaks to me. It's amazing. And sometimes it goes beyond that. It just blows me away to see what He Does or Says or Is. That's the thing. I feel like I really wanted and needed to do this service, actually. I think that's why anyone serves the Sacred Archives. It enlivens everything. Being able to Commune with Bhagavan in that way is fantastic.

**Q:** So very true. Thank you, Tim.

*If you are inspired by the work that Tim Holmes and others are doing at the Sacred Archives of Adidam, please consider making a monthly donation. Every dollar you donate will go directly to fund this all-important Digital Preservation Project.*

**Even \$5 or \$10 a month will help**

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