

Capturing the Voices of the Bay

Sample Interview with Joey Jones

The following was prepared as a sample interview, compiled after Joey Jones was lost at sea. Information was compiled from interviews with Joey's children, Lisa and Mike Jones, NOAA staff, and personal correspondence with the authors.

Interviewer: So Joey, what brought you to Moss Landing?

Joey Jones: Well, my dad was in the military so we moved around a bit. I was born in El Paso, Texas, but grew up in Oklahoma. When I was 9, my dad was transferred to Fort Ord so we lived in Monterey. I didn't move to Moss Landing until the mid 90s when I started packing frozen bait. Until then, I fished mostly out of Monterey.

I: Tell me about your family. Do they fish?

JJ: I tried getting my son hooked on fishing, but he has chosen a teaching career instead. Other than that, no, no one in my family fishes for a living. I was the first in my family. You know, growing up in Texas and Oklahoma, there wasn't much fishing, mostly just in lakes. In Monterey, I'd always bring my kids, Lisa and Mike, out on the boat to help. Mostly just scrubbing floors, fixing nets, that kind of thing, when they were young. One time I had them help out to earn money for a vacation to Disneyland! I



Joey Jones. (Courtesy Lisa and Mike Jones.)

think at one point my son, Mike, was considering taking over the business from me. He fished with me quite a bit – herring at first in the winter months – and I think he enjoyed it for the first few years, but eventually went on to other things. He teaches history at a local university now. My daughter Lisa learned a lot on the boat as well and had the drive and motivation that are pretty necessary in fishing but she never really seemed too enthused about becoming a fisherman. She lives in Boston now and works in the hotel management

industry. I never wanted my kids to work as hard as I sometimes had to in this industry. I'm happy they've both found something that they enjoy as much as I enjoy fishing.

I: How and when did you realize you wanted to be a fisherman?

JJ: I was always really interested in baseball, old cars, BB guns, those types of things. When we first moved to Monterey, we went down to the wharf and took a cruise. That was when I realized I loved the ocean. I used to hang out and fish the wharf all the time. When I was 11 years old, I got a job at the wharf taking care of fishing skiffs at Randy's Fishing Trips. I'd be down there all the time, working long days, before and after school, in the summer. I loved it.

I: Tell me about the boats you've owned.

JJ: The first boat I leased was the *Shady Lady*. She was 40 feet. Then I had a 32 foot salmon troller, the *Lisa Ann*. Then I built the

Network, a brand new purse seiner and we fished for anchovies. I got the *Lethal Weapon* in '88 or '89 for herring fishing out of San Francisco Bay. *Lethal Weapon* and a wooden boat I had, the *Holiday*, broke free of their moorage during a storm in 2002 and got swept away. They showed up on the beach at Fort Ord and I was able to salvage *Lethal Weapon*. Then I got *Wild Thing*, a 32-footer with the same twin engines as *Lethal Weapon*.

I: How did fishing impact the lives of your family?

JJ: I think my family loves the fact that I am a fisherman. Sure, there have been some difficult times, mostly financially and just a lot of time when I wasn't at home much for weeks at a time. But when I was home, we'd spend a lot of time together. My kids and their friends always loved helping me on the boat, fixing nets, watching for fish, pulling up the nets, hanging around the wharf. We always had fishing nets in our yard and around our house. I remember one Thanksgiving we were all patching up nets between cooking and eating! The kids really fell in love with my boats. They'd spend a lot of time on them. I remember my daughter, Lisa, was really upset when the *Lethal Weapon* got swept away. Almost like if a pet went missing.



One of Joey Jones' boats. (Courtesy Lisa and Mike Jones.)

I: Over the years you probably became quite a handy man. What skills do you use as a fisherman?

JJ: A little of everything, and a lot of some things. I basically did it all. I learned to weld so I could stretch my boats longer, adding on when I needed more room or additional equipment. And welding was great for making some extra money. I'm able to repair my boat engine and all the gear on my boat. I help people all the time. Fixing and repairing anything on their boats, like their engines, rigging, equipment. My friend, Freddy, and I used to think up all kinds of new things to build and weld on our boats. We'd be hanging out at the tackle shops or the Lighthouse Restaurant, sitting there drawing up blueprints on napkins or business cards if we didn't have any paper. We'd ask each other for advice all the time, and you really knew your friends and who you wanted to ask for help. A lot of the fishermen came to me when they needed help welding. Besides these engineering and welding skills, I needed to know all of the obvious things

you need to do while you're out on the water. Like chart reading and navigating, knowing the tides and all the weather patterns, how to fix nets and lines, tie knots. I also needed to know the ecology of the ocean to be a successful fisherman. What kinds of fish live where, what effect the seasons and ocean conditions have on the fish, which method is best for catching each fish. Anyone that's been fishing can tell you it's a different kind of "knowing" than fisheries biologists or managers that sit in their offices. When you're out on the water, you can see it, smell it, hear it, feel it. You learn so much that way. I always think people should get out on a boat before any big regulations and decisions are made.



Joey sizing up an octopus. (Courtesy Friends of Moss Landing Marine Laboratories.)

I: How has the fishing industry changed since you've been a part of it?

JJ: It's changed so much. I basically started fishing for fun, but then I began to make some money from it, on a small skiff fishing for rock cod using hook and line. I also worked on some party boats just pulling line and winches. When I really started learning to fish, I'd go out with the Sicilians who'd been fishing Monterey Bay for generations. This was tough because most of them didn't speak English, so I learned all the fishing words in Italian! But they had an

innate feel for it. They spent a lot of time learning and trying out things for themselves, and they played a huge role in teaching me how to fish. They used lampara nets back then.

I: What are lampara nets?

JJ: They're similar to purse seine nets. With a top line and a shorter, heavier lead line. Lampara nets have graduated mesh sizes, while purse seine nets have uniform mesh. Purse seine nets are easier to pull and trap the fish because you pull a rope and it basically bags the net up and pulls the bottom together, like a purse. Lampara nets require more work to wrap the fish in the net.

I: Has new technology changed fishing?

JJ: There's so much new technology on boats now. You can find out anything you want to know with GPS, sonar, radar. But back when I started fishing, these things didn't exist. I had to read maps and navigation charts, and know the weather and what the sea was doing and the currents and understand the patterns and behaviors of fish. We learned a lot from stories and working with fishermen who were older and more experienced. But only if they respected you and wanted to tell you their secrets!

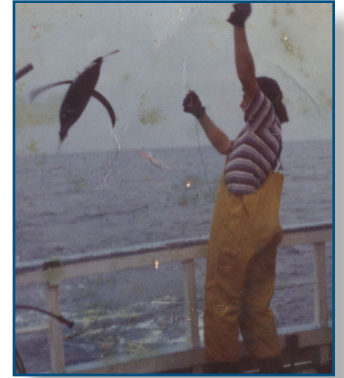
I: Do you like all this new technology?

JJ: That's a tough question. It's amazing really. Everything you can find out with a touch of a few buttons. But it can be scary too. What if they fail? You need to know how to take responsibility for yourself, your crew and your boat when you're out there in

case something happens. When I used to go out with my son when he was first learning, I'd say there was a power failure and turn off all the buttons and make him navigate and do everything without the support of technology. It's so important to know how to navigate and operate a boat safely without the technology.

I: What would you say to young people considering a career in the fishing industry?

JJ: I would tell them that it's hard work. You need to have drive and passion and be resourceful and multi-talented, and a problem-solver. Unless they showed a really strong and early interest, I think I'd probably advise them to go to school and get their education. Go to college. This is hard work. And the financial side of it can be pretty up and down and you need to be prepared for that. Most importantly, you gotta love the ocean, being outside in the elements, and working with your hands. You put in long hours, sometimes 48 or 50 hours straight. If the fish are biting, you stay out there. It can be pretty grueling, but it's satisfying work. It got my kids through school. And personally, I love it. Even when I'm not catching anything I love being on my boat. Fixing it, cleaning it. There's a lot of regulation going on now too. Limiting what you can catch and when. It makes things difficult. You still get out there though and you see so many of the fish that everyone is saying aren't there. You just gotta know where to look for them.



Joey tuna fishing. (Courtesy Lisa and Mike Jones.)

I: What has been your favorite boating memory so far?

JJ: Back in the early 80s, I ran a 100-foot dinner/cruise ship, the *Princess Monterey*. It cruised in and around Monterey Bay and took longer trips to Hawaii. There were some pretty fun stories from that boat. The owner didn't trust anyone else to drive the boat. I had my picture taken with Clint Eastwood on that boat. One time one of the passengers, a dairy farmer I think, got really seasick. He offered me anything and everything to get him back to shore.



Joey showing off packaged bait. (Courtesy Friends of Moss Landing Marine Laboratories.)

I: So did you bring him to shore?

JJ: No! I had a boat full of paying customers! It was tempting though with all he was offering. (laughs.)

I: Thanks, Joey. This was fun.

JJ: It was. Thank you.